

AVOIDING THE POTHOLES:  
UNDERSTANDING THE “WHYS?”  
TO HELP PREVENT PASTORAL SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

A THESIS-PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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MAY 2016

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Dedicated to The Canadian Baptists of Western Canada with thanks for their support,  
encouragement, and confidence in me as a pastor and leader.

Man is born to trouble all the days of his life  
As the sparks fly upward from bonfires at night  
They fill up the heavens with pin points of light  
And I've got a hope that is not in this world

Time, it is turning like a plow in the field  
It roots up the earth and what's hidden is revealed  
Sowing the future while the past, it is sealed  
I've got a hope that is not in this world

Half of the battle is only with myself  
While the other half is something I can't help  
Lest I should stumble I try not to forget  
That every hair is numbered, every footstep, every breath  
And this life that I'm living it will not end in death  
I've got a hope that is not in this world  
I've got a hope that is not in this world

— Carolyn Arends, "*I've Got A Hope*," *Pollyanna's Attic*, 2006

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## ABSTRACT

Sexual misconduct in the pastorate is a problem that continues to plague humankind with its impact not only on the pastor in question, but on an ever-widening circle of people generating a profound negative effect. It can be likened to potholes, appearing seemingly overnight with detrimental effects, but what causes the erosion and is there a way to stay clear? Through biblical understanding, research, and interviews of therapists and pastors who have succumbed to sexual misconduct the purpose of this thesis-project is to unearth contributing factors, using this information for prevention, helping others not fall into the same holes.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### Introduction

The purpose of this thesis-project is to articulate central contributing factors as to why clergy succumb to the temptation of engaging in sexual misconduct, using this information to design a workshop and provide materials to help pastors become cognizant and address pertinent personal issues in order to prevent this transgression.

Moral failure in the pastorate is a topic of concern. As one listens to the news, watches TV, or reads the newspaper this has been a frequent topic the past three decades. From the scandals of well-known pastors such as Jimmy Bakker, Jimmy Swaggert, and Ted Haggard, the multiple indiscretions within the Roman Catholic Church, to the March 2014 sexual harassment allegations against Bill Gothard, sexual misconduct in the pastorate is at the forefront as an issue that needs to be addressed. “Research shows that nearly ten percent of Protestant pastors have sexual contact with someone other than a spouse while in the ministry, more than thirty percent of ministers engage in sexual behavior that they consider in appropriate, and more than fifteen percent of ministers qualify as addicted to Internet pornography.”<sup>1</sup> Diana Garland, lead researcher and Dean of Baylor University School of Social Work, comments: “We knew anecdotally that clergy sexual misconduct with adults is a huge problem, but we were surprised it is so prevalent across all denominations, all religions, all faith groups, all across the country.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Baker and John Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention, and Oversight* (Carefree, AZ: Gentle Path Press, 2011), xi.

<sup>2</sup> Ken Camp, “Study finds Clergy Sexual Misconduct Widespread,” *Christian Century* 126, no. 21 (October 2009), 14.

With such prevalence arises the need to understand the contributing factors in an effort to help prevent other pastors from perpetuating this crisis.

### **Pastoral Call for Purity**

God's Word calls us to live holy lives and "stay away from all sexual sin."<sup>3</sup>

Pastors, because of their position, are given the added requirement of being an example to others. The Apostle Paul commends Timothy, "Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity."<sup>4</sup> Sexuality is a wonderful gift from God, and with that bestowment are certain guidelines that not only protect the individual but society as a whole. The Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute notes: "that human sexuality is sacred; misuse of power underlies all forms of sexual compromise, compromise that violates human dignity and harms individuals and communities both emotionally and spiritually."<sup>5</sup> Sexual sin wounds at a deep level. "No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body."<sup>6</sup> Thus, when pastors depart from God's design for sexuality it damages not only their personal life, but also their example to the flock over which they preside.

The term "sexual misconduct" can involve a variety of behaviors such as affairs, sexual abuse, overt and subtle seductive speech, gestures, and sexualized behavior (e.g. touching, embracing, fondling). For the purpose of this paper the phrase will be used to

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (New Living Translation).

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 4:12. (New Living Translation).

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Myer Hopkins and Mark Laaser ed., *Restoring the Soul of a Church: Healing Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct* (Collegeville, PA: The Liturgical Press, 1995), v.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18 (New Living Translation).

include, but not limited to, “engaging in any sexual activity outside of monogamous heterosexual marriage,”<sup>7</sup> including chronic use of pornography.

Most denominations have a zero tolerance for sexual misconduct committed by pastors,<sup>8</sup> and as in other professional roles such as counselors and doctors, a code of ethics is established asserting that sexual contact with a congregant, client, or patient is strictly forbidden. With such stringent ethics and rules in place why does sexual misconduct continue to occur? Congregations, victims, and pastors themselves, frequently ask, “How did this happen?” Sexual misconduct is not an isolated problem but arises from a cluster of issues, some of which is an inappropriate response to other difficulties. Safeguard measures, such as never being alone in the office with a person where sexual attraction may be an issue, having windows in the office door or wall, accountability groups, and installing filters on computers to block pornography are all helpful steps to put in place to avoid sexual misconduct. The issue, however, goes much deeper since if one is so inclined, there are ways to circumvent these safeguards. What then is at the root of this proclivity to sexual sin, and how can the factors that feed it be addressed? There are many useful books that have been written to help pastors and churches heal and move forward following sexual misconduct. Denominations have focused on how to respond to this crisis and help with restoration, yet have tended not to give as much attention to prevention.

The question explored in this paper is: what are the deeper issues that have led to sexual misconduct in the pastorate? Through in-depth interviews, Biblical research, and

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<sup>7</sup> *Ministerial Protocol Manual: For the Churches of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC) and those Credentialed by the CBWC* (April 2015), 34.

<sup>8</sup> Such as: Assemblies of God, Baptist (Canadian, General Conference, North American, Fellowship, General, Southern), Christian and Missionary Alliance, Full Gospel, Foursquare, Grace Brethren, Mennonite, Presbyterian, and Salvation Army.

reading of pertinent sources, this author will look for common elements predisposing a pastor, male and female alike, to cross a sexual boundary. The interviews and examples in this thesis, however, will predominately feature men, as the majority of pastors currently are male. The desired outcome is to share these findings with pastors in order to help them grasp those indicators and precursors that, left unheeded, could lead to succumbing to sexual sin.

### **A Past and Present Issue**

Sexual misconduct is not just a current phenomenon. As one looks throughout the Old and New Testaments, examples and instructions are given. The sons of Eli the High Priest took advantage of their position in the Tabernacle in order to engage in sexual misconduct, seducing the women who were assisting.<sup>9</sup> King David, the Lord's anointed who is described as one having a heart after God, misused his position and slept with Bathsheba.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the New Testament there are passages offering warnings for succumbing to sexual sin and ways to avoid it. In observing how the Corinthians were taking their freedom in Christ and turning it into permission to engage in sexual immorality, the apostle Paul challenged the believers to flee from sexual sin and to guard their minds.<sup>11</sup> Paul was aware of the inclination one has to sin and addresses the struggle.

Although not a new problem it is an issue that seems to be on the increase. Statistics regarding pastoral sexual misconduct are difficult to obtain, as many denominations are reluctant to disclose this information. Some of the most accurate statistics are in regards to pornography where an increase in usage can clearly be noted.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Samuel 2:22

<sup>10</sup> 2 Samuel 11:2-4

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:12, Romans 12:2

In August 1999, eleven percent of the calls received on Focus on the Family's Pastoral Care Line were about pastors and online pornography. In August 2000, online pornography concerns prompted twenty percent of the calls. In the following year they reported that forty percent of pastors had visited a porn site, with more than one-third having done so in the past year.<sup>12</sup> *Christianity Today*, in that same year, reported that thirty-seven percent of pastors admitted online pornography was a struggle.<sup>13</sup> According to a survey conducted in 2014 by the Barna Group, sixty-four percent of self-identified Christian men and fifteen percent of self identified Christian women view pornography at least once a month (compared to sixty-five of non-Christian men and thirty percent of non-Christian women).<sup>14</sup>

Sexual indiscretion goes beyond the use of pornography. Statistics coming out of the United States in 2003 report: "Thirty-three percent of pastors confess 'inappropriate' sexual behavior with someone in the church."<sup>15</sup> In a survey of one hundred pastors in the Church of England, when asked, 'since ordination, have you done anything with someone (other than your spouse) that you feel was sexually inappropriate?' forty percent responded in the affirmative.<sup>16</sup> In the forward to the book, *Fallen Pastor*, Jake Larson comments that: "pornography and sexual integrity is the number one threat to pastors today."<sup>17</sup> Harry Schaumberg, writing about the seriousness of sexual sin in the pastorate,

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<sup>12</sup> Christine J. Gardner, "Tangled In The Worst Of The Web," *Christianity Today* (March 5, 2001), accessed January 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/march5/1.42html>.

<sup>13</sup> "The Leadership Survey on Pastors and Internet Pornography," *Leadership Journal* (December 2001), accessed July 29, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2001/winter/12.89.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Barna Group, *Pornography Statistics: 250+ Facts, Quotes, and Statistics about Pornography Use* (Owosso, MI: Covenant Eyes, Inc., 2015), 20.

<sup>15</sup> H.B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Thaddeus Birchard, Clergy Sexual Misconduct: Frequency and Causation. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 15 no.2, (2000), 127-139.

<sup>17</sup> Ray Carroll, *Fallen Pastor: Finding Restoration In A Broken World* (Folsom, CA: Civitas Press, 2011), 14.

comments: “The pervasiveness of this problem is one of the greatest spiritual challenges facing the Christian church in this postmodern age.”<sup>18</sup> The struggle continues, impacting more and more people with devastating results.

### **Jim: A First Look at the Problem**

The story of a fictional pastor, whom I will refer to as Jim, illustrates what can transpire and the questions it provokes. Jim sensed a call to ministry when he was in high school; he had a passion for his faith in Christ and wanted to serve Him. To work towards this goal he went to Bible school and then seminary; during his time in seminary he married Susan. Upon graduation Jim began working at a church as an associate overseeing children, youth, and young adults. He loved his job; it gave him joy and fulfillment but there were difficulties in his marriage. He described it as “empty”, that he and his wife just seemed to be going their own ways. Jim worked with the music director, Jenny, with whom he found he had a lot in common, including marriage struggles. They often spent time together chatting and then one night alone in the church office they kissed. Before long they worked things out to have a night alone and slept together. Further sexual encounters were not repeated, not because of Jim’s resolve or remorse, but due to illness on the part of Jenny’s husband. The one-night affair was never exposed but years later Jim found himself involved in another affair. How did this happen? Was it just that his marriage was in difficulty or was there more behind his downfall? Is this a pattern that Jim will repeat or are there things he can understand about his life that will help prevent him from engaging in sexual misconduct again?

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<sup>18</sup> Harry W. Schaumburg, “The Sexually Addicted Minister,” *Assemblies of God Enrichment Journal*, accessed May 2013, <http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org>.

## **The Impact**

Pastors are invested with authority, standing in as representatives for God and are granted trust, responsibility, and power. They are given the sacred task of caring for individuals, guiding them in their spiritual journey. When that position is abused there is a ripple effect, it does not remain static and the consequences are long lasting. Stanley Grenz and Roy Bell comment that it is an abuse of power and a betrayal of trust. “It is a violation of a sacred sexual trust, marrying the beautiful picture God has given of the relationship of Christ and the church. And it is a violation of a power trust, abusing the privilege of the pastoral position with which the ordained leader has been endowed by the church and its Lord.”<sup>19</sup> Crossing sexual boundaries carries a far-reaching, adverse impact in the lives of many.

Even though it may be enjoyable for the moment, sexual misconduct adversely impacts the pastor; these effects are both internal and external. Their relationship with God is shaken; they know they have betrayed their calling and often feel cut off, not able to sense God’s grace and forgiveness. They experience guilt, anxiety, humiliation, and shame. There is often the loss of one’s job and career, which is profound for a pastor as his/her sense of call and giftedness are rooted in their ministry. Many pastors are not trained to do anything else, so where now do they go? There may also be the loss of key relationships, such as with family, spouse, and friends. Gordon MacDonald writes about the impact on him as a result of his moral failure saying: “For the rest of my life I will have to live with the knowledge that I brought deep sorrow to my wife, to my children,

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<sup>19</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 17.



and to friends and others who have trusted me for many years.”<sup>20</sup> The pain and loss to a pastor can be immense.

Not only does sexual misconduct in the pastorate have a detrimental effect on the pastor, but also impacts an ever-widening circle of people, from those specifically involved in the misconduct, to one’s family, the congregation, and society as a whole. “The damage done when a leader’s sexual sin is published is exponential. Wounds to church members, attendees, visitors, seekers and pagans from sexual sin in clergy ranks are profoundly damaging. Successive generations are often impacted acutely.”<sup>21</sup> In an article following the resignation of a mega church pastor due to sexual coercion, Garlinda Burton, the United Methodist Church Commission’s top executive, noted that “at least one-third to one-half of the dozens of victim-survivors I’ve counseled during the past eight years have left the church.”<sup>22</sup> These people live with shame, frustration and often a loss of hope. Even if the misconduct has not been brought out into the open, damaging results still occur.

Extended family members of erring clergy also suffer from the consequences of sexual misconduct and experience profound pain and loss. The spouse suffers from betrayal, often carrying tremendous hurt and anger about the deception. A spouse may lose friends as well as their place within the church. Following her husband’s affair one woman shared: “It is impossible to describe the mental and physical pain.”<sup>23</sup> Sexual misconduct impacts a spouse at a deep level resulting in hurt, anger, shame, grief, and

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon MacDonald, *Rebuilding Your Broken World* (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1988), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Dale Wolery, “Hooked On Sex,” Clergy Recovery Network, 2009, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.clergyrecovery.com>.

<sup>22</sup> Audrey Barrick, “United Methodists Confront Sexual Misconduct in the Church,” *The Christian Post*, January 29, 2011, accessed January 13, 2016, <http://www.christianpost.com>.

<sup>23</sup> Annette Lawson, *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1988), 221.

disillusionment. Children face feelings of anger, aversion, and frustration. If not processed with the help of others, these feelings are acted out in inappropriate ways or buried only to resurface in other ways in the future. Some of these can be outbursts of anger, aggression, withdrawal, depression, some form of escapism, distrust of others, and a loss of faith.

Misconduct wounds a congregation spiritually. Pastors lead people in worship, guiding people's spiritual lives, and when sexual misconduct occurs it discredits their ministry; people question the sermons they heard, advice given, books read, even the receiving of the sacraments. Congregants feel betrayed and can carry this over to their relationship with God. In studying the impact upon congregations where sexual abuse by a pastor had taken place, there are many issues that result, some obvious and some hidden that can "leave the congregation and its leaders in a deeply wounded state of affairs for long months and years."<sup>24</sup> Some question if God will let them down as their pastor did; they no longer know whom they can trust.

### **Material Analogy**

Sexual misconduct can be likened to a pothole in the middle of a road. A pothole is defined as a deep round hole in a road or other surface.<sup>25</sup> Potholes are formed by water that over time has seeped under a road's pavement through cracks or through spaces along the roadside. The water underneath, along with weather changes and pressure causes the pavement to erode. These holes appear seemingly overnight. Driving along a road and hitting a pothole can be disastrous. Erosion and cracks in one's life can open

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<sup>24</sup> Hopkins and Laaser, *Restoring the Soul of a Church*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2015, accessed January 13, 2016, <http://merriam-webster.com>.

the door to sexual sin. It is vital in order to avoid the potholes of sexual misconduct to understand the process and learn the key factors involved in contributing to the creation of these cracks and the cause of erosion.

The focus for helping pastors is often placed on external resources such as seminars, courses, reading books, and resolving to work harder. Even though these can be very helpful they only scratch the surface. If one merely attempts to alter behavior it does not address the underlying foundation that needs to be explored. It is like putting a layer of asphalt on the surface while erosion is continuing underneath. Eventually the pothole will emerge unless the fundamental underlying issues are addressed.

### **Importance of Prevention**

With such devastating affects on the lives of so many individuals and the harm it causes spiritually the issue is serious. This thesis-project addresses the pressing need to pursue the prevention of sexual misconduct. If pastors, both old and young, are alerted to the predisposing issues that lead one into falling into this hole, might we stem the tide of pastoral sexual misconduct? This author answers that question in the affirmative. By exploring the variety of aspects that contributed to sexual misconduct by pastors interviewed and research done, we shall discover the factors that cause such behavior, and by identifying these arrive at preventative measures. Interviewing pastors who have fallen and counselors who work with individuals who have fallen, will provide insight, revealing common threads that led to the misconduct. Through these findings a practical strategy for helping others avoid the potholes shall be proposed.

## **Five Possible Issues**

In this author's preliminary research, five key factors that have been identified as contributing issues to the cause of sexual misconduct are: denial of risk, lack of spiritual growth, isolation and loneliness, unattended past wounds, and pornography. Many other factors such as how one copes with stress, marital issues, lack of Sabbath, boundary issues, and health changes have also been noted. Further issues will come to light as pastors and therapists are interviewed. These five issues are repeatedly noted as underlying contributing factors predisposing a pastor to succumb to this temptation.

### **1. Denial of Risk**

Denial of risk is the first factor, with pastors believing the myth "it won't happen to me." Pastors, congregants, and in the past even many seminaries (where fortunately change is occurring) do not expect that pastors will struggle sexually and thus do not prepare themselves to address issues around sexuality. Mark Laaser, through personal experience and working with countless pastors, comments that "moral and ministry failure can happen to any of us and it happens all the time."<sup>26</sup> When pastors make the assumption they are not at risk, their guard is down so they miss the subtle steps of erosion. "Any pastor is susceptible to the temptation of misconduct."<sup>27</sup> When a pastor is in denial of her/her sexual desires, either by failing to understand or acknowledge the reality of these desires, what may begin as an altruistic action can turn into a sexual boundary violation. "When pastors fail to look at their shadow side they feed a dangerous delusion that their efforts are always well intended, their power always benign,

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 21.

and the problem is with the difficult people whom they are trying to lead.”<sup>28</sup> Viewing oneself with a certainty that you will never stray from God’s standards sexually is a seductive trap. As fallen creatures we are all vulnerable to this kind of fall. Scripture tells us that we all have a propensity toward sin, and calls people to be alert because the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour.<sup>29</sup> By admitting this predisposition pastors can remain vigilant in guarding their heart, mind, and soul so they do not fall prey to these temptations.

## **2. Lack of Spiritual Growth**

Spiritual health is a fundamental concern. People might think that allowing one’s relationship with God to wither and die is not an issue for pastors, but it is a very real problem. Pastors can become so focused on the needs of others that they can ignore their own needs, not only emotionally and physically, but also spiritually, neglecting their personal walk with Christ. Getting caught up in the duties and rituals that are to be performed can become just that, a performance. Susan Howatch in her series of six novels poignantly portraying ministry life, refers to this persona as a “glittering image,” representing the idea of not letting one’s true self be revealed, putting forth the picture that one is “perfect, perfect, perfect, a model for his flock, a Christian hero on a pedestal.”<sup>30</sup> Pastors must put God first, delighting in Him and allowing Him to fulfill their deepest desires.<sup>31</sup> When attention to this essential part of one’s life is neglected, others are looked upon to fill the gap.

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<sup>28</sup> Parker J. Palmer, “Leading from Within” *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2000), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Romans 3:23, 1 Peter 5:8

<sup>30</sup> Susan Howatch, *Absolute Truths* (New York, NY: Fawcett Crest, 1994), 153.

<sup>31</sup> Psalm 37:4

Part of spiritual health is having one's identity rooted in Christ, knowing they are loved unconditionally. Scripture states that we are created by God, chosen by Him, adopted into His family, sons and heirs, a new creation, and that He has put His Spirit in our hearts.<sup>32</sup> If one's identity is built on success or failure, when performance expectations are not met, identity disintegrates and emotional affirmation is often sought in unhealthy ways. The tendency can be to grab on to activity in an effort to prove worth. Kevin Mannoia notes that when pastors build their identity on successful performance it "places them on a fast track to burnout, moral failure or a false sense of security."<sup>33</sup> Pastors must stand in the assurance that their identity is in God, not how well they perform or whom they serve. When one is secure in this knowledge, knowing who they are, knowing that they are loved deeply by God, and that they are serving God alone, freedom results. What you do or how well you do it is no longer the determining force in one's life. A relationship with Christ where one is growing, nurtured, and listens for His voice is vital for prevention of sexual misconduct.

### **3. Isolation and Loneliness**

A third contributing factor is isolation and loneliness. Due to busy schedules, feeling a need to put up a good image, and constant scrutiny, pastors can isolate themselves, losing intimate connections. "Lack of intimacy is the biggest factor for ministry burnout and failure."<sup>34</sup> Ministry demands can produce a life out of balance where one does not get adequate rest and exercise and where one ignores what is going on emotionally and spiritually. When pastors become overworked, facing the constant

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<sup>32</sup> Psalm 139:13-15, 1 Peter 2:9, Ephesians 1:4-5, Galatians 4:6-7, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Corinthians 1:22

<sup>33</sup> Kevin W. Mannoia, *The Integrity Factor: A Journey in Leadership Formation* (Vancouver, BC, Canada: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 34.

<sup>34</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 11.

barrage of people's needs, the tendency can be to withdraw. Over time this lack of connection leaves one feeling vulnerable and alone. "One of the greatest contributors to sexual sin is loneliness."<sup>35</sup> Issues of intimacy with God and with others can set one up for seeking fulfillment in sexual encounters. God created mankind as relational beings, trying to do it alone is not what God intended.

#### **4. Unattended Past Wounds**

A fourth key area that affects sexual misconduct is in regards to the wounds of one's past. Family histories involving such things as: repressed feelings, low self-worth, conditional love, abuse, lack of nurture, abandonment, and poor communication play into a pastor's life, affecting him/her consciously or unconsciously. When these affects are not addressed there is a vulnerability to sexual temptation that results. As Mark Laaser and Ralph Earle have treated pastors, they have discovered that with all the pastors involved in sexual misconduct, they "found roots of their inappropriate behavior in their families of origin."<sup>36</sup> When a pastor carries wounds and unmet needs from childhood into their adult life they can inadvertently seek personal validation and affirmation through their role as a pastor. Congregations often feed this problem, putting pastors on pedestals, viewing them as being closer to God, offering them acceptance and appreciation. However, when struggles arise and the pastor no longer feels supported, and lacking the necessary skills to deal with their wounds past and present, he/she turns to sex as a way to fulfill unmet needs and longings. The unrealistic expectations placed on ministers and their own unmet self-esteem needs are a big part of why ministers

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<sup>35</sup> Mark R. Laaser and Ralph H. Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap: A Resource for Ministry Leaders* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), 103.

<sup>36</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 44.

sometimes fail in ministry.<sup>37</sup> Studies done in the mid nineties revealed “over eighty percent of sexually exploitive professionals experienced psychological wounding in their formational environments.”<sup>38</sup> This is a staggering statistic and if this is still the case, presents one of the key areas to address to prevent pastoral sexual misconduct. Issues in one’s past need not preclude someone from becoming a minister, but serious, honest work must be embarked upon to understand and receive God’s healing in these areas of brokenness so as not to react out of woundedness. By getting to the deep core issues of one’s life, transformation in Christ can occur.

## **5. Pornography**

A fifth area is pornography. Through this author’s reading, it is as if this is a ‘gateway drug’ opening the door to not only chronic use but also to other sexual misconduct. Dr. Mark Schwartz, at the Masters and Johnson Institute in St. Louis states: “Sex on the net is like heroin. It grabs them and takes over their lives.”<sup>39</sup> Pornography can seem innocuous on the surface and in this day and age viewing pornography (other than child pornography) is often seen as harmless behavior. However, this activity leads one down a path of desiring more and more and engaging in other inappropriate sexual behavior. Mark Laaser and Ralph Earle refer to pornography as “a virus affecting the heart and soul of Christian leadership.”<sup>40</sup> Viewing pornography is not a habit one can easily break as it impacts hormones and neurotransmitters.

As men fall deeper into the mental habit of fixating on these images, the exposure to them creates neural pathways. Like a path is created in the woods with each

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<sup>37</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> Hopkins and Laaser, *Restoring the Soul of a Church*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Jane E. Brody, “Cybersex Gives Birth to a Psychological Disorder,” *The New York Times on the Web* (May 16, 2000), accessed July 21, 2013, <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/national/science/health/051600hth-behavior-cybersex>.

<sup>40</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 8.



successive hiker, so do the neural paths set the course for the next time an erotic image is viewed. Over time these neural paths become wider as they are repeatedly traveled with each exposure to pornography. They become the automatic pathway through which interactions with women are routed. The neural circuitry anchors this process solidly in the brain.<sup>41</sup>

One pastor shared: “When I was introduced to pornography at about ten years of age, it was like throwing gasoline on a fire. The dysfunctions and neglect in my family left me hurting and looking for ways to numb the pain. I learned very quickly that sex is a powerful drug.”<sup>42</sup> To use the analogy of forming a pothole, pornography creates erosion in one’s life, slowly seeping in through the cracks and eventually forming a hole.

### **Methodology and Parameters**

To uncover the ‘whys’, so as to help pastors prevent sexual misconduct; this author interviewed seven pastors who succumbed to sexual temptation while in ministry. These pastors are from North America and one of these pastors is a woman. Each interview was approximately an hour in length and explored factors that contributed to the event, seeking to discern what issues led them to cross a sexual boundary. Five interviews were conducted with Christian therapists who work with pastors who have succumbed to sexual misconduct. In these interviews the questions explored were based on understanding why they think pastors fall into this trap. These interviews were put together looking for commonality of responses, seeing if certain factors were repeated. The aim was to get at the heart of the issue, understanding some of the underlying causes so as to present these findings to pastors with the goal of prevention.

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<sup>41</sup> William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 85.

<sup>42</sup> Darrell Brazell, “Breaking Point,” *Leadership Journal* 32, no. 1(Winter 2011), 47.

## CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

In order to gain a theological understanding of sexual misconduct in the pastorate, this chapter will focus on sexuality from God's perspective, the importance of believers and pastors to remain pure, and biblical guidance on how sexual purity can be upheld. Specifics over what is or is not considered misconduct will not be addressed as this author is following the guidelines determined by The Canadian Baptists of Western Canada, "that participation in any activity that is described as sin by the Scriptures would not be affirmed."<sup>1</sup> The focus will thus not be on specifics of what constitutes sin, but God's intent for sexuality and how one can adhere to biblical standards.

### **Sexuality as a Gift**

Sexuality is a good gift that God gave to mankind. In the Genesis account we read that God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us"<sup>2</sup> and that when God created Adam He saw it was not good for him to be alone and created a partner suitable for him.<sup>3</sup> Both man and woman had the same nature "but what man lacked (his aloneness was not good) she supplied, and what she lacked he supplied. The culmination was one flesh —the complete unity of man and woman in marriage."<sup>4</sup> The relationship between man and woman provided an intimacy that encompassed not only a physical bond, but also a mental, emotional, and spiritual connection. The statement in

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<sup>1</sup> "Ministerial Protocol Manual: For the Churches of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada. (CBWC) and those Credentialed by the CBWC" (April 2015), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:26 (New Living Translation).

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:18

<sup>4</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1: 31.

Genesis 1:24 of being “united into one” is a reference to this multi-faceted linking. Jesus reiterates this verse as is noted in the gospel accounts of Matthew and Mark, and the Apostle Paul repeats this concept in Ephesians and in First Corinthians. The essence is that there is something deeper taking place than just a physical act. The Message paraphrase highlights this when it interprets 1 Corinthians 6:16 as: “There’s more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact.”<sup>5</sup> Sexual union involves more than just physical contact; it provides an intimate connection in all areas of life. God’s design in sex involves a bonding of spirit, soul, and body. “God intended our sexuality to be a life-giving, renewing experience in many dimensions of our lives; spiritually, emotionally and physically.”<sup>6</sup> The book Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon) demonstrates the value God places on romantic love and sexual union. “The Song of Songs expresses the beauty of this love as God intended it.”<sup>7</sup> Sex is a gift and a reflection of a creation that God has declared as good.<sup>8</sup>

Scripture informs us that God has declared that sex is good but we also see in scripture admonitions to avoid sexual sin. Along with this gift came certain parameters. These parameters or standards are not arbitrary, capricious rules, but rather guidelines designed for human welfare. As humans we have been given free choice and can heed God’s admonitions and purpose for sex or follow actions contrary to God’s best. “We are ‘free’ in a sense to ‘do’ whatever we want with our bodies. However, we are not free to determine whether what we do with our bodies is good or evil.”<sup>9</sup> Sex was meant to

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:16 (The Message).

<sup>6</sup> Earl Paulk, *Sex Is God’s Idea* (Atlanta: Dimension Publishers, 1985), 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, 627.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1:31

<sup>9</sup> Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners: A Basic Introduction to Blessed John Paul II’s Sexual Revolution* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009), 23.

provide pleasure, “but equally important, through its expression men and women unlock some of the mystery of who we are: creatures made for relationship, completed and defined through the other.”<sup>10</sup> When sexual relationships occur outside of a marriage commitment a bond develops where one should not occur. The Apostle Paul affirms: “or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her?”<sup>11</sup> God designed sex and it has meaning within the guidelines He has set forth. There is beauty and blessing in sex as well as pitfalls and traps when misused.

Rather than stressing the sacredness and gift of sex, it seems the church has often tended to focus more on the negative aspects of the pitfalls and traps and in so doing sex as a gift from God has been cheapened rather than cherished. Some Christians “assume that closeness to God requires an alienation from, and even a repudiation of, all things sexual.”<sup>12</sup> When one does not fully grasp sex as God intended the result can be to undervalue and misuse this gift. Greg Johnson comments; “Sexual sin is a failure to accept with thankfulness the high value God places upon sex as part of his holy creation order.”<sup>13</sup> He goes on to say that: “what makes sexual sin sinful is that it detracts from the glorious vision God gives us for what sexuality can be. It values sex too little.”<sup>14</sup> The gift of sex is for a covenant relationship, creating a union between husband and wife that is to reflect a deeper spiritual union where they give themselves to one another. “The deception that says ‘sex is evil’ does not lift people to a higher dimension of life. It is the

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Ann Mayo, *A Christian Guide to Sexual Counseling* (Eugene, OR: Wipph and Stock Publishers, 2003), 10.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:16 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>12</sup> Dan Scott, “Sacred Sexuality: Passion as Prayer” (revised academic paper, Psychological Counseling Services, Scottsdale, AZ, 2002), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Greg Johnson, *The World According to God: A Biblical View of Culture, Work, Science, Sex and Everything Else* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 135.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, *The World According to God*, 137.

misuse of sex which is evil.”<sup>15</sup> Responding in dissociated, unconscious, self serving ways to one’s longing for a loving sexual connection can be the consequence of believing erroneous messages about sex. Gaining an understanding of God’s design opens the way to responding in healthy, life giving ways. When pastors are not clear on their theology of sexuality they can end up following the lead of culture, where the tendency is to follow what feels right or wrong rather than wrestling with an understanding of what God intends.

Sexual union is also an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one, reflecting an intimacy that occurs between God and mankind.<sup>16</sup> In light of this connection, the poem Song of Songs is often viewed as an allegory or metaphor of Christ’s love for the church. The intimate relationship of a man and a woman is a reflection of God’s love for his people and the intimacy possible in union with Him. In scripture the word ‘knowing’ is used for two people engaging in intercourse, conveying an understanding and connection at a deep level.

The Bible assumes that the human soul seeks this kind of knowing, both with God and with a human beloved. The Bible also assumes that the body is the means through which this knowing takes place. Therefore, communication with God and communication with one’s beloved differs only in the parts of the body employed; the process and intensity of the communication can be amazingly similar.<sup>17</sup>

This desire to know and be known resides within all humankind. Our sexuality emanates from a sense of incompleteness that is expressed by a desire for wholeness and a yearning for God.

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<sup>15</sup> Paulk, *Sex is God's Idea*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ephesians 5:32.

<sup>17</sup> Scott, *Sacred Sexuality*, 17.

Throughout scripture there are references to God's relationship with His people as a husband with his wife. "As the Scriptures say, 'a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one."<sup>18</sup> The book of Hosea supports this concept as it provides a portrayal of God and His relationship with Israel. "Hosea's marital experiences, which included the heartbreak caused by his wife's unfaithfulness and the joy of their renewed relationship, provide the framework for this message."<sup>19</sup> God's response to his people is: "I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion."<sup>20</sup> The Biblical story is the story of God and his beloved, redeeming mankind out of His love and compassion. God reached out through Christ providing a way to restore an intimate connection with Him.

In God restoring this connection, He expressed His love and commitment with humankind in covenant. Jesus made this new covenant through the gift of His body. He gave up "His body for His Bride (the Church) so that we might become 'one flesh' with Him."<sup>21</sup> In John 6:56 He says: "Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."<sup>22</sup> "The offering of His body confirms the truth of His love for us, and the consuming of His flesh and blood seals our oneness with Him."<sup>23</sup> We were purchased by the blood of Christ, a bride price if you will, and in response are to honor God with our bodies.<sup>24</sup> God's gift of sex is to be viewed in the light of the incarnation

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<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 5:31-32 (New Living Translation).

<sup>19</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books 1985), 1: 1379.

<sup>20</sup> Hosea 2:19 (New Living Translation).

<sup>21</sup> Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> John 6:56 (New Living Translation).

<sup>23</sup> Christopher and Rachel McCluskey, *When Two Become One: Enhancing Sexual Intimacy in Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2004), 49.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:20.

and His covenantal love, offering all of who we are in response.

As humans we are made in God's image and are designed for intimacy, an intimacy that is reflected in many ways, one of them being physically. This physical expression is a gift, but one that is to be enjoyed within a covenantal relationship. Gaining an understanding of sex from the perspective of it as a gift that brings intimacy and connection physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, reflecting the mystery of Christ and the church can assist people in not only appreciating the benefits but also realizing the exploitation and pain that can occur when sex is misappropriated.

### **Sexuality and Spirituality**

There is a powerful connection between spirituality and sexuality. Sexuality embodies energy, creativity, bonding, and intimacy, elements that connect mankind's relationship with God. "Sexuality expresses our wholeness as people, it relates us to others, it is a place for the expression of love, and it is an embodiment of the desire for union with God. Thus, sexuality and spirituality are linked."<sup>25</sup> "Satan knows of this powerful connection between sexuality and spirituality, and one of his goals has always been to get people to glorify him rather than God. So he encourages us to express something other than love through our sexuality: lust, selfishness, disobedience, lies."<sup>26</sup> When people dissociate sacredness from sexuality not only is their view of God, creation, and human nature set askew, but it can also open them up to developing adverse ways of relating to others sexually.

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<sup>25</sup> Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton, *Sex in the Parish* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 32.

<sup>26</sup> McCluskey, *When Two Become One*, 50.

In John chapter four Jesus encounters a woman who had been involved with several men. He doesn't confront her immorality but acknowledges her behavior and addresses a deeper issue in offering her living water. Jesus gets to the heart of her thirst pointing her to a more thirst-quenching permanence in a relationship with God. Jesus knew her heart's desire was for connection with God, a deep knowing and intimacy with Him.

When we yearn for life-giving relationships with any person or part of creation, we are at the very same time reaching for God. For, according to an incarnationalist faith, God is the spiritual presence who becomes incarnate in and through creaturely flesh. Another way of saying this is that we are simply longing for more live-giving connectedness between our sexuality and our spirituality.<sup>27</sup>

The Hebrew understanding of sex grasped this connection of spirituality and sexuality but when the Greek ideology of dualism between body and soul arose, that understanding was lacking. "With this Hellenistic influence, Christianity lost its inheritance of a unified sexuality and spirituality. This divorcing of sex from the spiritual continues to affect both the attitudes and the behavior of Christians today."<sup>28</sup> To link sexuality and spirituality for many people seems like an oxymoron. However, when sensuality is blocked it ends up also blocking one's spirituality. "Sexuality, sensuality, and spirituality are fundamentally linked."<sup>29</sup> Our sexuality is richer, broader, and more fundamental to human life than simply genital sex. "Our sexuality is intended by God to be neither incidental to, nor detrimental to our spirituality, but rather a fully integrated and basic

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<sup>27</sup> James B. Nelson, *The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality and Masculine Spirituality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 14.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Ann Mayo, *A Christian Guide to Sexual Counseling* (Eugene, OR: Wipph and Stock Publishers, 2003), 25.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Sexual Anorexia* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1997), 139.



dimension of that spirituality.”<sup>30</sup> A renewed understanding of this connection opens the door to grasping some of the issues with which current society contends.

This connection brings an insight into the sexual struggles observed in the pastorate today. Pastors have a desire to serve God, following Him with their whole being. One could possibly say pastors are wired to be more spiritual, that they have a deep spiritual passion pursuing God with their whole lives. If this deep yearning becomes impeded through various situations and circumstances in the pastor’s life, it follows that they would seek fulfillment sexually. Dan Scott, who has worked both as a pastor and a therapist comments: “The very hunger for intimacy that fuels our longing for God is exactly the same force that motivates us to ‘know’ another human being. That is why ‘spiritual’ people have a notorious propensity for acting out sexually.”<sup>31</sup> People are often surprised when a pastor succumbs to sexual temptation, but is this actually an understandable response for someone with a deep spiritual hunger?

### **Sexual Admonitions**

As God’s creation we are to honor God with our bodies, what we do with them matters to Him. Scripture admonishes us:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> J. B. Nelson and S. P. Longfellow, *Sexuality and the Sacred* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), xiv.

<sup>31</sup> Scott, *Sacred Sexuality*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Romans 12:1-2 (New American Standard Bible).

When people step outside of God's design for sexuality, what is good and acceptable and perfect is missed and one loses out significantly. God's Word provides admonitions to warn His children of the significance and consequences of sexual sin. Scripture is resolute that the body is not meant for sexual immorality. The Apostle Paul clearly states this in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, underscoring that the Holy Spirit indwells the body of believers. Immorality is something that God takes seriously and to overlook this part of one's life is inconsistent with the character of the Holy Spirit. The warnings are serious and not to be taken lightly.

### **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

The Apostle Paul wrote to various churches that were seeking to grow in their new-found faith in the midst of pagan and extremely erotic cultures. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians one of the issues he addresses is in regards to sexual immorality. The Christians at that time were surrounded by a society not unlike ours in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in that sexual images and promiscuity were commonplace. In response these Christians were taking the freedom they had in Christ and turning it into license to engage in sexual immorality. Paul writes to sharply warn them against this permissive stance.

The Corinthian people, in defending their sensual behavior, reasoned that sex was a bodily function like hunger. "They treated sex as an appetite to be satisfied and not as a gift to be cherished and used carefully."<sup>33</sup> In verse thirteen Paul states their case that: "Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food."<sup>34</sup> "They reasoned that food was both pleasurable and necessary. When their stomachs signaled hunger, food was taken to satisfy them. So too, they argued, sex was pleasurable and necessary. When

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<sup>33</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 1: 589.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:13 (New American Standard Bible).

their bodies signaled sexual desire, they needed to be satisfied.”<sup>35</sup> This line of thinking is seen repeated over the centuries. “Lenin pronounced his famous Glass of Water Theory, legislating that the sexual act was of no more consequence than the quenching of thirst by a glass of water.”<sup>36</sup> This attitude is prevalent today, that having sex is no big deal; it is just a matter of filling an urge.

A more accurate view of sex would not be as a glass of water but rather as a bottle of expensive fine wine. A bottle of fine wine is to be savored, paired with food, and enjoyed in the company of others. The wine is not to be put in a paper bag and consumed in a back alley to get a “high”, or guzzled when one is thirsty as one does with a glass of water, but given a place of honor, appreciated sip by sip. A fine wine enhances a meal, it brings delight and it leaves one satisfied rather than miserable the next day from over indulgence. Sex is not just a bodily function that needs to be satisfied, or a compulsive urge to be fulfilled, but a privilege, a unique experience that opens up one’s senses and brings connectedness to another.

Paul counteracts the notion of sex as a bodily function by asserting in the rest of the verse: “but you can’t say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality.”<sup>37</sup> As human beings our body, mind, and spirit are interrelated. Human sexuality is not a matter of instinct just for the purpose of reproduction as it is for animals; it is an expression of relationship and is a spiritual and theological reality. “Because we are made in God’s image, our bodies also make visible something of God’s invisible mystery.”<sup>38</sup> Paul’s reference here to the body involves the whole person, one created by God. “To assert

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<sup>35</sup> Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2: 516.

<sup>36</sup> Terry Muck, ed., *Sins of the Body: Ministry in a Sexual Society* (Carol Stream, IL: Word Publishing, 1989), 21.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:13 (New Living Translation).

<sup>38</sup> West, *Theology Of The Body For Beginners*, 6.

that the sex act is purely recreational is to deny our embodied existence; it is to suggest that sexual intercourse is an act of the body that does not involve our inner selves.”<sup>39</sup>

Scripture makes it clear that our bodies are not separate from our mind and spirit and were not made for sexual immorality; they were made for the Lord and to bring glory to Him.

### **James 1:13-16**

James gives instruction regarding a wide variety of issues. His purpose is to assist individuals and the church as a whole in understanding the path to Christian maturity. His teachings are deeply rooted in key Old Testament texts and in the teachings of Jesus. These teachings and commands of Christ continue to clash with society’s values and one can get caught up in focusing on freedom, no longer needing to follow rules and regulations, thinking that as long as one has faith in Christ they have life. James “was concerned with the consistency of genuine faith as evidenced by its results, that faith should be active, not a mere profession covering a life of sin.”<sup>40</sup> He addresses many practical issues pointing out how Christians are to live out their faith in the everyday parts of their life. What a person does carries an impact on them as an individual and the community around them.

James uses two vivid images to convey how sin functions. The first image is drawn from fishing, that of being lured or enticed. The image is one of “a fish swimming in a straight course and then drawn off toward something that seems attractive,

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<sup>39</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 81.

<sup>40</sup> K. A. Richardson, “James,” *The New American Commentary*, electronic ed. Logos Library System; (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 36:37.

only to discover that the bait has a deadly hook in it.”<sup>41</sup> The second image has to do with childbirth. The desire gives birth to sin and the sin gives birth to death. Both images result in death, “the fish takes the bait, is hooked and pulled to shore, where it dies. The childbirth results in death.”<sup>42</sup> James points out that sin is not a casual thing to be ignored, that the consequences are serious, leading to destruction

Sexual immorality is a matter of spiritual life or death. The propensity to sin lies within us, so to live a life of sexual purity requires a lot of effort and hard work. Paramount to this is studying and meditating on the truths in God’s Word, heeding the challenge in James: “Don’t I beg you, only hear the message, but put it into practice.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Instructions for Pastors**

First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus are letters written from a senior missionary pastor to his associates, addressing various pastoral issues they would likely encounter. Aware of the challenges facing Timothy as he ministered in Ephesus, Paul urged him to set an example for others, living a life of purity. He states: “in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.”<sup>44</sup> As God’s children we are all called to live holy lives, but there is an added responsibility placed on pastors. The call to be a pastor is a high one, living a life of purity, setting an example for others. The word translated purity in 1 Timothy 4:12 is ἀγνεΐα, (*hagneia*)

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<sup>41</sup> Richardson, *The New American Commentary*, 78.

<sup>42</sup> R. Ellsworth, *Opening up James*, (Leominster, Herefordshire, UK: Day One Publications. 2009), 43-44.

<sup>43</sup> James 1:21 (J. B. Phillips Translation).

<sup>44</sup> 1 Timothy 4:12 (New American Standard Bible).

meaning a moral purity; chastity.<sup>45</sup> In everything pastors do they are to show themselves as God's servants, which includes sexual purity. It is vital for pastors to see that sexual impropriety is not something to dismiss or evade. The giving of oneself wholly in the pursuit of godliness is part of the pastoral call.

Within the past couple of decades there has been a wave of pastors caught in sexual sins. "These people did not begin with an agenda that included such sins. But they allowed themselves to nurture the lie that they deserved 'comfort,' even if from an illicit source."<sup>46</sup> Pastors, along with other believers, unfortunately have the capacity within to sin. It is important for pastors to realize this fact and not be deceived thinking they are above the lure of sin. First John provides a crucial reminder that "if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us."<sup>47</sup> Coming to Christ does not make one impervious to sin; temptation entices or lures by one's own appetite or imagination. The charge to pastors is diligence in addressing this call to purity.

### **1 Timothy 4:6-16**

Paul's first letter to Timothy, a new young pastor, encourages and instructs him, as he faces the task of leading the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was a very cosmopolitan seaport located at the intersection of two major land routes. Not only a thriving center of commerce and finance, it was also was a place of worship for pilgrims coming to the temple of Diana, also known as Artemis by the Greeks. The temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and a place of idolatrous worship.<sup>48</sup> "Since Artemis was a

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<sup>45</sup> B. M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies, 1993), 2.

<sup>46</sup> David P Nystrom, *The NIV Application Commentary: James*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1997), 82.

<sup>47</sup> 1 John 1:8 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>48</sup> M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

fertility goddess, cultic prostitution was an important part of her worship, and hundreds of ‘priestesses’ were available in the temple.”<sup>49</sup> Paul had spent considerable time in Ephesus sharing the good news of the gospel and understood the cultural situation. The letter is written to Timothy who was instructed to stay and carry on the work of ministry, being ordained to lead the church. As Ephesus was fast becoming one of the greatest cities in Asia and was notorious for its occult practices and lascivious worship of Diana, Paul knew there would be unique challenges facing Timothy as he ministered in that city. The letter was sent to prepare and equip Timothy, providing instructions for conducting worship, selecting leaders, and warnings against sin that was so prevalent.

Paul asserts in this passage three predominant things that require effort and attention: importance of the word of faith, godliness (including sexual purity), and being an example to others. The contemporaries of Timothy followed many myths, and the activities of their gods involved adultery, rape, murder, lying, and deceit. Paul saw that developing personal holiness was fundamental. As a minister Timothy had to make the effort and be attentive to this part of his life. This would affect not only those to whom he ministered, but also his personal life of faith.

As a pastor Timothy needed to give time and attention to his spiritual life, living out the instructions of God’s Word and conveying them to the church. The Word of God was to be central in his ministry. He was to be diligent in teaching and in his own sanctification; life and doctrine were not to be separated. Timothy is exhorted to develop godliness and as a result be an example for others to follow.

As in Timothy’s time, we who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are faced with divergent ideologies that can pull us away from sexual purity. We are bombarded with sexualized

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<sup>49</sup> Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:479.

images and surrounded with beliefs that lust, pornography and pre-marital sex are all normative behavior. To counteract this barrage pastors need to be a positive example, not neglecting studying and meditating on the truths in God's Word.

The result of living a holy life, not only pleases God, but also brings freedom and allows others to see God.<sup>50</sup> It doesn't follow naturally that you become a Christian or take ordination vows and sexual purity will automatically follow, it takes effort and determination. In verse six, the comparison is made between physical training and training for godliness. Ephesus was well known for its 'gymnasium', "there was no institution more characteristic of Hellenic culture than the gymnasium, where youth in schools were subjected to a rigorous course of athletics."<sup>51</sup> A life of godliness involves not just knowing the truth, but also following it with obedient actions. This takes determination and effort similar to someone doing rigorous training in the gymnasium. Giving oneself wholly to the pursuit of godliness, being continually nourished by scripture, allowing God's Word to nurture and sustain oneself, are all essential to the pastoral call.

## **Upholding Sexual Purity**

### **1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**

Paul writes his letter to the Thessalonians giving an exhortation to live in a way that pleases God. He affirms that his readers have been living according to the teachings that he had earlier given to them but exhorts them to keep following these instructions. One pleases God through proclaiming His Word and living accordingly. Paul stated in

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<sup>50</sup> Hebrews 12:14

<sup>51</sup> Steven M. Baugh, "1 and 2 Timothy," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Arnold E. Clinton (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2002), 3:465.



Romans 8:8 that “those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”<sup>52</sup> Paul imparts a plea for sexual purity on the basis that sex is part of God’s design and is not to be degraded or exploited. He states that God’s will is sanctification, which involves a dedication to moral purity. “Sanctification designates the Christian as one possessed by God and/or dedicated to the service of God.”<sup>53</sup> Sanctification includes our sexuality, the word translated sanctification in verses three, four, and eight is the word ἁγιασμός, (*hagiasmos*) which carries the meaning of “consecration, dedication, sanctification, holiness i.e., dedication to the Lord, and/or dedication to moral purity”<sup>54</sup> Paul highlights four aspects of sanctification: abstaining from sexual immorality (vs. 3), knowing how to control one’s own body (vs. 4), not living in lustful passion (vs. 5) and not wronging or taking advantage of another person (vs. 6). Paul regarded living this way as of utmost importance; to reject this was to reject God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul never claimed that sexual desire itself was evil but that the unrestrained lust that leads to ungodly actions is immoral. Paul knew of the weakness of human nature. He saw the tendency to allow oneself to be caught up in impurity and lawlessness resulted in falling ever deeper into sin.

The commands mentioned in chapter four are not exhaustive but reflective of the problems facing the Thessalonian congregation. The employment of prostitutes and the custom of ritual sexual intercourse in several of the cults were common in the city of Thessalonica. As people came to faith in Christ and became part of the church, they had to struggle with a new sexual ethic whilst living in a permissive society. Some of the

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<sup>52</sup> Romans 8:8 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>53</sup> D. M. Martin, “Thessalonians,” *The New American Commentary* electronic ed. Logos Library System, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 33:122.

<sup>54</sup> J. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek New Testament electronic ed.*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1997), 40.

sexual attitudes and practices facing people today have changed from the time Paul wrote this letter, but the society in which we find ourselves tends to be predominantly sexually permissible. For most Christians today, living a sanctified life involves living counter culturally. This requires discerning the cultural customs and values against God's standards and taking the stance to follow His will.

### **Fundamental Elements in Preventing Sexual Sin**

God's Word does not leave pastors without guidance on how to remain sexually pure. Throughout the Old and New Testament there are many passages that not only offer direction, but also provide stories of individuals giving examples for what to do and what not to do to follow God's design for mankind sexually. Many helpful instructions are written throughout scripture, what follows, however, is not exhaustive but a brief sample of four select principles that provide guidance in dealing with sexual temptations and remaining pure.

#### **Reading God's Word**

A central text in guiding how one remains sexually pure is Psalm 119:9-16. In this text the psalmist asks the question: "How can a young man keep his way pure?"<sup>55</sup> The response is to hide God's Word in one's heart. The Message paraphrases this as: "How can a young person live a clean life? By carefully reading the map of your Word."<sup>56</sup> Psalm 1:2 also emphasizes the importance of meditating on God's Word. Taking the time to read and understand scripture is foundational to one's faith. God's Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, gives life; fresh truth comes out of God's

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<sup>55</sup> Psalm 119:9 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>56</sup> Psalm 119:9 (The Message).

Word no matter how long ago it was written. This is not reading God's Word just as a religious duty or to gain information for a sermon, but listening and following the spirit of the text, seeking how it applies to one's life. "Nothing is more essential as ministers than our vibrant personal relationship with the One who both called us and sustains us. Without it, we have nothing to offer of any real value to anyone."<sup>57</sup> Understanding truth from God's perspective, learning ways to follow His will and living in the reality of His presence through His Word enables one to live a life pleasing to God.

### **Flee**

In 1 Corinthians 6:18, after Paul has instructed his readers to refrain from sexual immorality, his advice for how to do this is to flee. It is not a matter of remaining in a situation and trying to be strong, but rather running from it. Dr. Curtis Mitchell has observed three different kinds of temptations outlined in scripture, noting that a different response is needed to deal with each one. He refers to these as the ABC's of temptation. "Type A, the devil, attacks the God-consciousness or the spirit. Type B, the world, attacks your self-consciousness of the soul. Type C, the old sin nature, attacks the appetites of the body."<sup>58</sup> To deal with the temptation of the flesh, the instruction is to flee. "So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."<sup>59</sup> The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife is an example of this advice to flee. Potiphar's wife repeatedly put pressure on Joseph to sleep with her. One day when no one else was around she grabs his garment

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 43.

<sup>58</sup> C.C. Mitchell, *Let's Live! Christ in Everyday Life* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1960), 52.

<sup>59</sup> 2 Timothy 2:22 (English Standard Version).

and tells him to lie with her but Joseph does not try to stay and resist, he runs.<sup>60</sup> Mitchell notes: “Sometimes you will have to literally run with your feet as did Joseph. But more often you will be called upon to run from the situation.”<sup>61</sup> Rather than trying to fight the battle the best tactic in regards to sexual temptation is to leave and remove oneself from the temptation.

In Matthew chapter five Jesus addresses the issue of lust saying: “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”<sup>62</sup> Jesus is not talking about a literal cutting off of a body part but expressing a separation, again not fighting the temptations but not looking, not touching, a cutting off from the source. “Our Lord certainly means that we are to *strike at the root* of such unholy dispositions, as well as cut off the occasions which tend to stimulate them.”<sup>63</sup> Pastors are to distance themselves from temptations, not participating in compromising situations. Removing oneself from the source of sexual temptation is a crucial way to avoid sexual sin.

### **Addressing Thought Patterns**

Scripture addresses the issue of what one thinks about, advising believers to take every thought captive.<sup>64</sup> There are several passages that affirm this proposition. Philippians 4:8 says: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Genesis 39:12.

<sup>61</sup> Mitchell, *Let's Live!*, 59.

<sup>62</sup> Matthew 5:29 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>63</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>64</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:5.

<sup>65</sup> Philippians 4:8 (New American Standard Bible).

Wisdom literature illuminates this noting: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”<sup>66</sup> Paul in the book of Romans reiterates this by saying: “let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” What one dwells on is important; it does make a difference where one’s focus lies. This reaches into the area of fantasy, “unbiblical fantasy opens the door to self-indulgence, robs the pastor of healthy sexual enjoyment, and can begin the process that leads him into sexual misconduct with all its attendant disasters.”<sup>67</sup> An initial thought is not the problem; it is what one does with it. Being honest and aware of one’s thoughts, bringing them before the Lord is one of the scriptural admonitions that help one stay sexually pure.

### **Acknowledging Power Differential**

Biblical discourse on the topic of sexual purity would not be complete without reference to the story of David and Bathsheba in Second Samuel. Many things can be learned from this story. The prominent issue being how one can use the power inherent in one’s position to fulfill personal desires. David at this point in his life was older, mature; one could say he should have known better, but he succumbs to the temptation and takes that which was not his. It was spring and at that time it was customary to resume military activity, so he sent his troops into battle while he remained in Jerusalem. One afternoon while relaxing he gets up and sees Bathsheba bathing. He sends for her, sleeps with her and then sends her home all while her husband is off fighting. One thing observed in this story is the power differential, which can be noted in the word “sends.” David sent to inquire about Bathsheba, he sent for her to come and sends her home.

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<sup>66</sup> Proverbs 23:7 (New King James Version).

<sup>67</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 59.

David took advantage of his position as King, having the power to induce Bathsheba to come to him. He placed himself in authority doing as he pleased, not submitting to God's will, but doing whatever he wanted. Eugene Peterson, in a lecture on the earthy spirituality of David, points out: "David is acting as if he were God, acting like God in relation to Bathsheba."<sup>68</sup> He goes on to say that: "The root of David's sin with Bathsheba was not sexual, the root was: sexual, the root was: 'I am a god, I can do whatever I want.'"<sup>69</sup> David takes his position as king and imposes his power on Bathsheba; he does the same with Uriah, giving orders to have him killed. To David's credit he later acknowledges the sin in his actions but to realize this power distinction and its abuse earlier on, would have saved a lot of heartache.

Pastors are in a position of power and as such need to recognize the responsibility this places on them. Inherent in the position is a spiritual authority. Pastors are looked upon as the spiritual leader of the congregation and are granted trust. "The pastoral role by its very nature gives the pastor access to people's lives on a very intimate level."<sup>70</sup> Having this access places parishioners in a position of vulnerability. "The parishioner, especially one who is in crisis or despair or grief, is vulnerable and is likely to trust the pastor. The parishioner's guard is down, and it is easy for pastors to step over appropriate limits."<sup>71</sup> As the story of David attests, it is easy to use one's power for one's own personal benefit. Pastors need to be aware of this power imbalance taking extra

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<sup>68</sup> Eugene Peterson, "David: Earthy Spirituality: Bathsheba Story" (lecture, Regent College, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> Peterson, *David: Earthy Spirituality*.

<sup>70</sup> Marie M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred? The Story of a Pastor, The Women He Sexually Abused, and the Congregation He Nearly Destroyed* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1999), 42.

<sup>71</sup> Lebacqz and Barton, *Sex in the Parish*, 101.

steps to not use their position to gain personal sexual influence, abusing the trust given to them.

This biblical story is a warning of how easy it is to use one's power for sexual fulfillment and that this abuse of power is sin. Understanding this power differential, realizing how it can be abused and that this is sin can assist a pastor in gaining a perspective of his/her responsibility to safeguard the use of their authority.

### **Conclusion**

God graciously does not give admonitions without offering guidance on how to follow them. Today's culture, as with cultures of the past, has distorted sex, and unfortunately many religious traditions have not counteracted this, but rather have perpetuated a misunderstanding of sexuality. For pastors to fulfill their God given calling, to bring the gospel message of hope and healing, it is vital for them to understand both biblically and theologically God's design for sex. Through grasping the truth of God's intent in this gift, and heeding the advice of scripture, prevention of pastoral sexual misconduct is possible.

## CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

In considering the literature on pastoral sexual misconduct, many books have been written regarding the stories of a pastor's moral failure and how churches, families, and pastors can heal after such an ordeal, but the field of resources in regards to prevention is somewhat limited. This gap of focus is one of the reasons this author chose to delve into this subject. The books chosen as salient sources, compared and contrasted for this thesis-project are: *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate*; *Preventing Ministry Failure*; *Pastors At Greater Risk*; *The Pornography Trap: A Resource for Ministry Leaders*; *Before The Fall: Preventing Pastoral Sexual Abuse*; *Ashamed No More*; *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention, and Oversight*; and *Absolute Truths*. Many other books provided helpful information supporting the key risk factors gleaned from these books and several of these sources are cited in other chapters.

### Overview

One very helpful work for this topic is *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate*. Stanley Grenz and Roy Bell outline the issue of sexual misconduct and provide helpful guidance on prevention. Though written twenty years ago, this book is clear and concise, addressing issues that remain current today. The premise in *Betrayal of Trust* is that when sexual misconduct occurs, pastoral trust is betrayed in two areas, that of sexuality and power. The reader is walked through understanding the problem



theologically; the book then focuses on practical responses in regards to prevention and how churches can respond when misconduct occurs.

*Preventing Ministry Failure* is a helpful book in working with pastors, as it not only provides insight, but as a workbook it offers reflective exercises on pertinent topics related to prevention. If a pastor is willing to take the time to work through the various exercises he/she will find themselves more attuned to the problems facing pastors and better equipped to deal with them. The authors, Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffmann, address seven areas of concern they discovered pertaining to ministry failure, referring to these as foundation stones. These are indeed helpful but do not seem to grapple with the fuller picture, (for example, the issues of one's family of origin, past wounds, and addictions address a deeper root which can contribute to the problems listed as their areas of concern). Included in their seven foundation stones are Leadership Skills and People Skills. Working well with people and cultivating a strong, beneficial leadership style are important components for effective ministry but for this author they play a part, but are not foundational in preventing pastoral sexual misconduct. I have included this book, however, as it adds many helpful tools in working through prevention of pastoral sexual misconduct. The questions provided in the book are thought provoking and many of the insights are helpful and congruent with other resources. More books like this are needed to assist pastors in their unique calling.

Aware of the significance and difficulty in pastoral ministry, the book *Pastors at Greater Risk* combine interviews, insights, and suggestions to assist pastors "to become whole individuals who balance being and doing, family and church, person and

profession, worship and work.”<sup>1</sup> For a church to impact others with the gospel, pastors need to be emotionally stable and spiritually solid. The book offers many helpful observations written to pastors from pastors. Sections include a variety of areas providing overall guidance and suggestions for pastors. Not all of this pertains specifically to sexual misconduct but the book offers a pro-active approach, laying a foundation for health that supports prevention.

*Before The Fall: Preventing Pastoral Sexual Abuse*, proved to be a very beneficial resource. The book explores the major issues in regards to pastoral sexual misconduct and offers helpful suggestions for prevention. Having observed the prevalence of sexual misconduct amongst pastors the book is focused on students in seminary and candidates for ordination, helping faculty, mentors, and denominational bodies gain an awareness of potential problems in order to put plans and structures into place. This thesis-project goes beyond those beginning in pastoral ministry but the information contained in this book was exceptionally helpful. The experience and knowledge of Friberg and Laaser bring understanding and awareness to this difficult topic.

Due to the insidious nature of pornography and it’s increasing prevalence among pastors, *The Pornography Trap: A Resource for Ministry Leaders* seemed important to include. Mark Laaser and Ralph Earle delineate the distinctions between: sexual sin and misconduct, sexual abuse, and sexual addiction. Understanding the distinctions between these is helpful as confusion over these terms exists, but for the purpose of this thesis-project a pastor involved in sexual abuse or addiction still falls under the category of

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<sup>1</sup> H.B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 15.

misconduct. The prevailing issue here is, why did this begin in the first place? The book contains an array of insights into sexual struggles for those in ministry.

Through grasping an awareness of the progressive nature of pornography including the book *Ashamed No More: A Pastor's Journey Through Sex Addiction* by T. C. Ryan, added another important layer to this thesis-project. The book not only delves into the struggles of sexual addiction but also does so specifically in reference to pastors. Ryan unfolds his story, explaining the causes of addiction and his journey to wholeness. The book was helpful in looking at addiction from a pastor's perspective, providing a depth of understanding as to why addiction occurs and steps one needs to take for recovery. Clearly expounded throughout the book is the understanding that "addictions or compulsive behaviors are merely the symptoms of something deeper."<sup>2</sup> Gaining an understanding of why pastors fall into sexual sin is the basis of this project to then alert pastors and address those deeper issues in order to prevent these behaviors.

There were two components of this book with which this author disagreed. One was in regards to having higher expectations and standards for clergy. Yes, pastors tend to be placed on a pedestal, which is unhealthy and damaging and can result in a tendency to hide struggles and weaknesses, thus not receiving the support and help they need. However, there does have to be a standard to which clergy must abide. As a person who leads others integrity is expected, behaviors such as lying, cheating, embezzlement, and abuse of power are not acceptable and harm people. As Ryan mentions, "I also have deep, deep remorse for the hurt I caused others."<sup>3</sup> To avoid this hurt pastors are called to a high moral standard.

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<sup>2</sup> T. C. Ryan, *Ashamed No More: A Pastor's Journey Through Sex Addiction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 18.

<sup>3</sup> Ryan, *Ashamed No More*, 191.

Ryan's take on in the church had some valid points to consider and offers some challenges, but it felt at times that he was justifying remaining in ministry while healing from acting out sexually. Ryan states, "Healthy churches expect brokenness among their leaders, accept leaders as they are with a spirit of grace and mercy, and provide everything necessary for healing, with the goal of uninterrupted service."<sup>4</sup> His comments such as this felt like they were coming from his personal pain of being asked to leave ministry while healing. Grace needs to be extended to broken leaders but discipline is also needed which may necessitate removal from ministry.

Providing a thoughtful systems approach to pastoral sexual sin is the book *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention, and Oversight*. As a newer book on the scene, Thoburn and Baker add their experience and wisdom, exploring how various elements influence one another to compound the problem of clergy sexual misconduct. They present three parts that provide the context of a ministers world; intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental.

These systems embody a sense of reciprocity where each member of a system, as well as each system, influences one another. The intrapersonal world of the pastor is shaped by internal neurological wiring and connection with one's personal core beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. These beliefs, attitudes, and feeling are shaped by the interpersonal world of his upbringing and reinforced by his spouse, family, church staff, and members of the congregation. The pastor's intrapersonal and interpersonal life is also impacted by the environmental constraints and conventions of the denominational system in which he works and the greater culture in which he lives.<sup>5</sup>

Understanding these systems helps gain an overall perspective, recognizing how various elements work together. The book was extremely valuable, providing insight and helpful resources through a variety of recognized experts.

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<sup>4</sup> Ryan, *Ashamed No More*, 213.

<sup>5</sup> Rob Baker and John Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention, and Oversight* (Carefree, AZ: Gentle Path Press, 2011), 7.

The book *Absolute Truths* by Susan Howatch is part of a series of six novels portraying the life of clergy in the Church of England. These novels provide an illustration of clergy as they deal with various struggles and temptations. Stories are powerful as they open up an understanding of how people respond and relate to one another, offering a connection between our thinking and emotions. *Absolute Truths* tells the story of a bishop, Charles Ashworth, during the mid 1900's. Howatch's books, such as *Glittering Images*, present a lot of food for thought for this thesis-project but I chose to focus on *Absolute Truths* for the way in which the character Ashworth ends up falling into sexual misconduct. Following the death of his wife, struggles in the church, problems in his family, and a past that continues to haunt him, he commits the very things he publicly denounced. After one sexual encounter he muses: "The truth was I had failed to be honest with myself, failed to face my weaknesses in order to survive them, failed to behave as a priest should – and now because of those multiple failures I was trapped in a mess which had the potential to destroy me."<sup>6</sup> The unfolding of his story, observing the way a pastor can react to ministry challenges, personal loss, and family dysfunction, provide a valuable illustration for this thesis-project.

These books will be discussed, looking for common threads and helpful tools for pastors to prevent falling into this pothole of sin. There are many other significant portions to these books, such as the nature of the problem of sexual misconduct (addressed in the first chapter of this thesis-project) and also guidance for restoration, however, the focus here will be on what these books propose specifically in relationship to understanding why this occurs and steps to take towards prevention.

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Howatch, *Absolute Truths* (New York, NY: Fawcett Crest, 1994), 330.

## Profiles

Grenz and Bell outline three profiles of pastors who are vulnerable to sexual sin: ‘The Predator,’ ‘The Wanderer,’ and ‘The Lover.’ Laaser and Earl suggest six categories: ‘The Naïve Prince,’ ‘The Wounded Warrior,’ ‘The Self-Serving Martyr,’ ‘The False Lover,’ ‘The Dark King,’ and ‘The Wild Card.’ This author would suggest that these six categories can be collapsed into the three suggested by Grenz and Bell, noting however, that the added delineation is useful in grasping with an understanding of the various issues that come into play. It must also be noted that pastors cannot be pigeonholed into one of these categories, usually there is a composite of features.

The first type of pastor who is vulnerable is ‘The Predator.’ This is a pastor “who actively seeks opportunities to abuse women sexually with apparently little or no sense of appropriate personal moral restrictions.”<sup>7</sup> This kind of pastor tends to be manipulative and controlling, attracted to powerlessness and vulnerability. The categories of ‘The Dark King,’ one who is “charming and charismatic, exploiting his or her power for personal gain”<sup>8</sup> along with the ‘Wild Card,’ a person with a mental disorder, as well as ‘The False Lover,’ one who tends to be creative, energetic, and charming who “loves taking risks, including the thrill of seducing another”<sup>9</sup> could all fall under this broader classification of predator. Unfortunately pastors who come under this profile can be difficult with which to work in regards to prevention as they tend to not be attuned to the needs of others, nor possess a willingness to address their own internal problems and take responsibility for their actions.

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 40.

<sup>8</sup> Mark R. Laaser and Ralph H. Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap: A Resource for Ministry Leaders* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 30.

The second profile noted in *Betrayal of Trust* is that of 'The Wanderer.' This person does not tend to be violent or premeditative, seeking out sexual involvement; rather "an overwhelming crisis or major transition in his life may tip the balance, leading him to step over the boundary into the forbidden zone."<sup>10</sup> The Wanderer struggles to maintain boundaries in relationships. These pastors do not go looking for sexual liaisons, but succumb to this area of sin seeking affirmation, connection, and fulfillment.

*The Pornography Trap* expands this profile of the wanderer in their three profiles. In the 'Naïve Prince' the pastor is one who is not aware of the risks and does not set up adequate boundaries. They tend to be more vulnerable and "given the right circumstances and stress level, this person can become romantically and sexually involved a bit naively."<sup>11</sup> The 'Wounded Warrior' and the 'Self-Serving Martyr' could also be placed within the category of 'Wanderer.' The wounded pastor is one who neglects self care, having their identity wrapped up in their profession. "Serving others is the main source of self-worth. Shame is a central issue for this person, so he or she receives, validation from the outside, including that which is sexual. Repressed wounds from the past fuel current conflicts."<sup>12</sup> The 'Self-Serving Martyr' adds another aspect in that this person tends to be older; having devoted their life to the church but due to unrelenting demands becomes resentful, feeling unappreciated, and abandoned. "Anger and resentment lead this person to feelings of entitlement, which lead him or her across sexual boundaries into misconduct."<sup>13</sup> If this has gone on for a prolonged period of time

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<sup>10</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 30.

they can begin to feel so entitled that they may cross from being a ‘Wanderer’ to that of a ‘Predator.’

The third type of ministers profiled by Grenz and Bell is what they refer to as ‘the Lover.’ This person “is motivated neither by the thrill of conquest nor by the need to overcome felt personal inadequacies. Rather, this pastor senses that he is in love, and the recipient of his affections happens to be a member of his congregation.”<sup>14</sup> Due to the emotional connection that often occurs between a pastor and people in their congregation, especially during times of counseling and grief support, romantic interests can ensue. If the pastor is single and maintains appropriate sexual boundaries this may or may not be a problem. However, due to the inherent power differential there is a potential for abuse.

In looking to understand the ‘whys’ for the purpose of prevention, it is helpful to understand these profiles so as to address underlying issues. However, these are just a starting point. Within these broader categories are certain risk factors. In pursuing the realm of prevention of pastoral sexual misconduct it is vital to understand the issues that put a pastor at risk. What are the triggers that can lead someone to fall into this pothole? In *Betrayal of Trust* Grenz and Bell suggest four factors that put pastors at risk, but they make the astute observation that, “taken individually, none may be sufficient to trigger clergy sexual misconduct. But together any number of them can lead an otherwise dedicated pastor into the forbidden zone.”<sup>15</sup> *The Betrayal of Trust* provides an example of this by including the story of a committed pastor who became sexually involved with a member of his congregation. This pastor struggled with a debilitating use of pornography, which contributed to marital difficulties. This combined with a

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<sup>14</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 46.



dysfunctional family of origin and workaholism were the risk factors that led him to engage in this sexual relationship.

In combining the works of these authors, nine areas of concern have come to the fore as contributing risk factors to sexual misconduct. As noted previously these do not stand alone, but interface with one another.

### **Nine Major Contributing Factors**

#### **Family-of-Origin**

The problems resulting from family-of-origin issues are viewed in each of the salient sources considered in this chapter as a factor contributing to sexual sin. Thoburn and Baker have experienced that “particularly with offenders, the presence of a trauma history is universal. Trauma does not need to be invasive in nature. It can also be a matter of neglect or abandonment.”<sup>16</sup> Grenz and Bell point out that, “family-of-origin considerations assist us in moving beyond the specific instance of clergy sexual misconduct to view the underlying problems that must be resolved if true healing is to occur.”<sup>17</sup> Laaser and Earle state that, “with all the pastors we have treated who have crossed inappropriate sexual boundaries, we have found roots of their inappropriate behavior in their families of origin.”<sup>18</sup> Friberg and Laaser note, “Developmental damage to an individual created by early life trauma creates an inability to experience love and nurture. Those who commit sexual misconduct are often starved for love.”<sup>19</sup> Unresolved issues are detrimental on many levels; thus discerning problems stemming from one’s

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<sup>16</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 57.

<sup>17</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate*, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> N.C. Friberg M. Laaser, M. *Before The Fall: Preventing Pastoral Sexual Abuse* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 32.

family of origin is an important place to begin when looking at risk factors. Was there abuse, grief, denial of feelings, addictions, and so forth? Have these issues been acknowledged, understood and brought to Christ for healing? London and Wiseman point out, “It’s almost never exclusively about sex. It’s frequently about family background. The way a person thinks and processes life is a big part of the problem.”<sup>20</sup> When unresolved childhood issues are carried into ministry, various negative behaviors can ensue. This can involve addictive patterns, lack of sexual understanding, and how to control one’s self. “Pastors who turn to pornography often have family histories of denial, low self-worth, repressed feelings, self-delusions, and the lack of healthy sex education.”<sup>21</sup> The challenges and trauma that arise from one’s family of origin tend to leave a pastor in a vulnerable position.

In *Ashamed No More*, Ryan points out the effect shame can have on an individual. He notes that when one is shamed in the family system “that shame becomes the overwhelming block to our ability to achieve an appropriate and healthy sense of who we are.”<sup>22</sup> Shame is directed at the core of one’s being, believing one is worthless. “Shame, often rooted in trauma, is the driving force behind sexually problematic or addictive patterns.”<sup>23</sup> Recognizing sin in one’s life is crucial to a walk of faith but living in shame damages one’s true sense of self.

A further component to take into account is in regards to a lack of communication learned in one’s family of origin. In some families it is not acceptable to express honest emotions, especially difficult ones such as anger, fear, and grief. “Those raised in

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<sup>20</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 244.

<sup>21</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 42.

<sup>22</sup> Ryan, *Ashamed No More*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 31.

families with poor communication appear to be at high risk for participating in sexual sin.”<sup>24</sup> Fear of sharing honestly and even looking at one’s emotional state block a pastor’s awareness and ability to receive support.

The message of the good news attracts those who are struggling. People look to the church for hope and healing, bringing their dysfunctional problems with them. Pastors have to address a variety of problems such as: sexual sins, addictions, broken marriages, low self-esteem, and personal loss. Pastors can be drawn into rescuing professions in response to a family of origin that consisted of rescuing and enabling. “If pastors don’t intentionally resolve their past personal problems, the demands dysfunctional people bring to them will create personal burnout, stress and depression.”<sup>25</sup> Giving fully of oneself to fixing problems, offering support, healing, and care can look very positive on the surface; however, if done out of compulsion and codependency the outcome is negative. As pastors focus completely on the needs of others they deny their own needs and feelings. By trying to be all things to all people “the codependent rescuer pastor is a prime candidate for clergy sexual misconduct.”<sup>26</sup> The unfolding of the story of Charles Ashworth demonstrates this so well. Rather than acknowledging his family problems and internal struggles Charles thrusts himself into his work trying to take care of everyone else.

### **Lack of Intimacy**

Grenz and Bell list fear of intimacy as their first subsection under family dysfunction. Intimacy issues may arise from one’s family of origin but they can also arise in response to stress or in reaction to hurt and so lack of intimacy is listed here as

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<sup>24</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 48.

<sup>26</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 51

one of the key risk factors. Laaser and Earle affirm lack of intimacy as a risk noting, “all forms of addiction, sexual and otherwise, can be traced to problems with intimacy – intimacy with God and with each other.”<sup>27</sup> Ryan shared that loneliness fed his growing compulsive desires. Wilson and Hoffmann reflect that, “lack of intimacy is *the* biggest factor for ministry burnout and failure.”<sup>28</sup> Friberg and Laaser note, “We find that clergy who manifest sexual misconduct or transgress boundaries generally are impoverished as far as intimacy with self, others, and God is concerned.”<sup>29</sup> Intimacy is crucial with God and with people. God created us with a desire for intimacy. Being created in His image, we were created as relational beings with a deep desire to know and be known. “But if we choose to believe that somehow the blueprint for humanity doesn’t apply to us - that we have no need for intimate relationships - we will tend to redirect our intimacy needs into all kinds of unhealthy alternatives to fill the void.”<sup>30</sup> Ryan notes that “sexual brokenness comes as a result of intimacy impairment, so often our acting out is a result of longing for the intangibles which sex can never meet, but deep down we intuitively understand that we long for.”<sup>31</sup> Genuine intimacy is not to be confused with sex; rather it involves a personal connection where there is an interchange of transparency and vulnerability. To be intimate with another involves a deep knowing at a heart level, requiring an honest disclosure of oneself.

Lack of intimacy generates loneliness and “one of the greatest contributors to sexual sin is loneliness.”<sup>32</sup> Many pastors “have no sense of balance between participating

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<sup>27</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 11.

<sup>29</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 92.

<sup>30</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Ryan, *Ashamed No More*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 112.

in community and being alone.”<sup>33</sup> When stresses in ministry are combined with low self-esteem, the tendency can be to withdraw from others in order to seemingly protect oneself; this leads to pastors feeling lonely and isolated. This loneliness sets one up for trying to fill the void in any way possible. Following the death of his wife, Charles Ashworth was cautioned about withdrawing from the support of others and isolating himself. His mentor, Jon, warned him, “one of your most debilitating problems, as I mentioned after the funeral, is likely to be isolation – an emotional isolation arising from the fact that extreme shock has made you unable to respond to all offers of help.”<sup>34</sup> It is often very difficult for pastors to ask for help. They are trained to be the ‘helper’ not the ‘helpee.’ To do so takes humility and courage, but to not do so can lead to disaster.

*Preventing Ministry Failure* offers some practical steps to foster greater intimacy in human relationships. The authors see this as crucial for “of the thousands of broken ministers we’ve met, one of the common threads in their stories is a lack of genuinely intimate friendships.”<sup>35</sup> When intimacy is not met this need does not go away but ends up infiltrating every aspect of one’s life. Thoburn and Baker attest to this noting how ministry is a lonely calling. When a survey with a sampling of pastors was conducted, seventy percent reported that they have no close friends.<sup>36</sup>

Pastors can withdraw from others in an attempt to protect themselves from hurt or disappointment; however, in trying to be careful with whom they share themselves secrets are kept, isolation and loneliness occurs. “The combination of loneliness,

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<sup>33</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Howatch, *Absolute Truths*, 237.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 10.

unbalance, narcissism, lack of accountability to God or man, and burnout creates the perfect storm for lust and sexual misconduct to occur.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Marriage Difficulty**

In *The Betrayal of Trust* marriage difficulties are also placed under the category of family dysfunction. The authors are referring specifically to unrealistic expectations of marriage. This author would contend that while unrealistic marriage expectations can occur as a result of one’s family of origin and can play a role in sexual misconduct, marital difficulties should stand on its own as a risk factor. *Pastors at Greater Risk* support this opinion and Thoburn and Baker note that, “Marital conflict and lack of marital intimacy are highly correlated with sexual misconduct among pastors.”<sup>38</sup> In an interview with Gordon and Gail MacDonald they share the struggles they went through and offer advice on making one’s marriage a priority. They see that “cultivating a satisfying marriage is an important part of emotional and spiritual wholeness.”<sup>39</sup> A pastoral couple faces many stressors, often being compounded by poor boundaries in regards to their time and privacy. Difficulty in one’s marriage contributes to a vulnerability to act out sexually. “Marital stress leaves some pastors tired, lonely, and needy.”<sup>40</sup> In an attempt to fill this emptiness, pastors can turn to people in the congregation whose marriage may also be in difficulty. A healthy marriage supports one’s ability to withstand sexual temptations. When a marriage is strained, either due to unmet expectations or other internal or external struggles, pastors can seek refuge and fulfillment in others.

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<sup>37</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 12.

<sup>39</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 109.

<sup>40</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 57.

## Nature of Pastoral Ministry

A category that some might not realize is a risk factor is the nature of pastoral ministry. “Past research and writing on clergy sexual misconduct has focused on the minister’s behavior, attitudes, and personality. However, the most efficient way to understand and mitigate against clergy sexual misconduct is to recognize dynamics for ministers within their professional contexts.”<sup>41</sup> Ministry is challenging on many levels and by its nature presents many risk factors. “Weariness, personal depletion, adversity and frustration, grief, loss, anger, stress, can all be part of the church system that pastors allow to become dysfunctional and impairing features of their personal lives.”<sup>42</sup> A clear sense of being called into ministry is vital.

To be in ministry when one is not called is to fight a battle one is not equipped to fight. Wilson and Hoffmann note, “We are sustained by the knowledge that God called us to the ministry for a specific purpose, one which becomes a driving passion to embrace each challenge set before us.”<sup>43</sup> When a pastor knows he/she has been called to ministry it is easier to withstand the difficulties that come. To have a healthy foundation for ministry it is important for pastors to be “aware of their own motivations for entering ministry and how they might be overly attracted to the use of power in ministry.”<sup>44</sup> A personal sense of call and assessing one’s motivation provide a healthy foundation for ministry.

The nature of ministry includes worship and spiritual awareness, evoking highly charged emotional responses. “Ministries and congregations in many ways treat their

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<sup>41</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 13.

ministers like gods.”<sup>45</sup> A pastor who is seen as representing God can unconsciously trigger passionate feelings from church members. Pastors also share intimately in the lives of their parishioners through hospital visits, counseling, and working on projects and programs. In these settings a trust and familiarity can develop. “Many congregants allow themselves to become vulnerable to their pastor in various ways.”<sup>46</sup> Secrets, hurts, and hopes are often shared with a pastor, fostering intimacy. As sexual intercourse is a demonstration of deepest intimacy, when a growing sense of closeness with another develops, sexual desire can be roused. The close intimate relationships that develop create a potential risk of which pastors need to be cognizant.

Pastoral ministry can be very demanding, often consuming all of the pastor’s time and energy. “Pastors feel victimized because the work is harder and more complicated than ever before. They work harder now yet see less response and fewer results.”<sup>47</sup> Pastors can get to the place “where they can’t stand the intense emotional demands that come from representing Christ.”<sup>48</sup> Going from the bedside of someone dying, to counseling a couple in crisis, to struggling through a board meeting can take its toll. One of the problems with this is that it “unconsciously creates the kind of climate in which he becomes emotionally susceptible to sexual transgression.”<sup>49</sup> It is important to realize churches can create an unhealthy climate contributing to a pastor’s susceptibility to sexual misconduct.

Pastors can also be placed on a pedestal, being viewed as the ideal and set apart above others. This puts pastors under a great deal of pressure to not only carry out their

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<sup>45</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 17.

<sup>46</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate*, 89

<sup>47</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 26.

<sup>48</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 195.

<sup>49</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 152.



duties well, but to withhold sharing their struggles and inadequacies. In addition “if clergy are seen as the intermediaries between parishioner and God, then they can become a metaphorical fault line that can shake a church to its core when they stumble and fall.”<sup>50</sup> Further to note is that if pastors think they are inadequate or unworthy, they tend to not affirm and care for themselves, focusing instead on performance and caring for others. “The pastor’s poor personal boundaries or the demanding expectations of the congregation may contribute to a workaholic pattern.”<sup>51</sup> In *Absolute Truths*, Ashworth comes from a position of needing to be perfect in his ministerial role as Bishop. He states, “A bishop had to be perfect, perfect, perfect, a model for his flock, a Christian hero on a pedestal – never ‘letting the side down,’ as we used to say at school, always ‘playing the game.’ The glittering image – being perfect, perfect, perfect.”<sup>52</sup> This pedestal persona sets one up for a fall.

### **Pastor’s Personality**

The personality of a pastor can play a role in how susceptible he/she might be to sexual sin. Pastors tend to be warm, empathetic, and attuned to relationships. These are positive attributes, contributing to congregants trusting and opening up to their pastor, but the flip side of this is that with unawareness it opens the door to crossing the line of sexual intimacy. If a pastor is struggling with his/her own issues he/she can sense this attraction and be drawn in, seeking to meet unfulfilled needs. “Clergy often experience significant denial about their own issues because they would suffer severe consequences if their problems were acknowledged or disclosed.”<sup>53</sup> Developing self awareness, a deep

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<sup>50</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 15.

<sup>51</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Howatch, *Absolute Truths*, 153.

<sup>53</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 24.

understanding of who they are, and grasping their own susceptibility is necessary for pastors to live with moral integrity. Low self-esteem and the need for approval are observed as having a significant impact. “Sexual misconduct is likely to occur when a pastor is struggling with low self-esteem and a sense of personal failure.”<sup>54</sup> Low self-esteem produces a feeling of powerlessness and a pastor “may attempt to bolster his self-esteem through the perversion of power he hopes to find in an illicit sexual liaison. The debilitating demands of the ministry and his need for affirmation – sometimes compounded by difficulties in his marriage – may combine to set him up for sexual failure.”<sup>55</sup> This is a profound area for consideration, as it seems “the quest for acceptance may be what originally draws some people to the pastorate.”<sup>56</sup> When a pastor is longing for approval they give all of themselves in order to obtain this, but churches can be places of relentless pressures, conflict, and criticism, leaving a pastor feeling discouraged and worthless.

### **Sexual Addiction, Fantasy, and Pornography**

In *Before the Fall*, the authors point out that “the presence of addictive behaviors also may indicate the possibility of offending.”<sup>57</sup> The term sexual addiction is controversial, with some miscounting it as a viable diagnosis. The term, however, can be helpful in understanding the compulsive nature of some sexual sin. “Sexual addiction is a person’s use of sex to alter moods that progresses to the point where they are unable to control their use of sex.”<sup>58</sup> “Addiction and its attending corollary, sexual fantasy, can be

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<sup>54</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 98.

<sup>55</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 133.

<sup>56</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 49.

<sup>57</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> Ryan, *Ashamed No More*, 21.

factors that lead a pastor to transgress the boundary of the forbidden zone.”<sup>59</sup> As previously mentioned these factors do not stand alone but work together; they need to be seen in light of other factors such as situational difficulties, low self-esteem, childhood abuse, and environmental influences. This is very evident in regards to sexual addiction and fantasy. Sexual activity is seen as a way to meet these needs. Compulsively acting out can be through such things as: pornography, masturbation, fantasy, and prostitution. Due to the nature of ministry, opportunities abound for pastors to engage in sexual fantasy. Pastors have unsupervised time alone, a flexible schedule, and free computer access. When pastors allow themselves to indulge in sexual fantasy it not only robs them of marital sexual fulfillment but also begins the process of leading one into sexual misconduct.

It is important to understand the chemical nature of our bodies and brain to realize the addictive side to sex. Neurochemicals such as dopamine and oxytocin are released as God’s design to strengthen the relationship of a husband and wife through sexual intimacy. “Physical arousal can be so powerful that it either can be a wonderful source of love and intimacy in a monogamous relationship or can lead to a choice to override common sense and a value system.”<sup>60</sup> It is like a drug and can be used to medicate one’s pain. “The nature of addiction is that the chemical reinforcements released in the brain during addictive behavior reinforce the patterns of the addictive cycle.”<sup>61</sup> Succumbing to the temptation of fantasy and pornography is indeed a trap, one that can ensnare a pastor.

London and Wiseman tell the story of a pastor getting caught up in pornography. Even before he visited his first pornographic website “his marriage was shaky from years

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<sup>59</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 56.

<sup>60</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 80.

<sup>61</sup> Ryan, *Ashamed No More*, 65.

of over-commitment to his work, isolation, poor communication, decreasing attempts to build more satisfying intimacy with his wife and gross neglect of self care. As an easy alternative to working to improve his marriage, pornography was always accessible, affordable and anonymous.”<sup>62</sup> Pornography can be a progressive acting out that can become addictive. “Our sexuality is meant to be lived and expressed in the context of a healthy, integrated life, and pornography is never an expression of good health or integrated living.”<sup>63</sup> Ryan goes on to point out that pornography magnifies human sexuality. It uses it for trade, distorts it and makes it larger than reality. “A clergy person who regularly uses cybersex generally feels that its power is stronger than his or her power to stop the behavior. The habit is also empowered by isolation. A pastor may seek isolation because of his or her personality type, stressors at home, or stressors at work.”<sup>64</sup> The temptation to anesthetize is reflected by Charles Ashworth when he states: “I had also been motivated by the desire to escape from my troubles by flirting with disaster.”<sup>65</sup> Understanding this is a start but support, love, and nurture are needed for prevention and restoration.

### **Spiritual Dryness**

Inherent to a pastor’s call is the call to be a spiritual leader. Spiritual struggles and challenges may naturally occur from time to time but when a spiritual state has waned to the point of spiritual dryness problems can arise. “A pastor is most vulnerable to sexual failure when his spiritual condition has deteriorated.”<sup>66</sup> Christ is the source of true fulfillment and to lose one’s first love compromises the pastor’s ability to withstand

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<sup>62</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 240.

<sup>63</sup> Ryan, *Ashamed No More*, 44.

<sup>64</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 139.

<sup>65</sup> Howatch, *Absolute Truths*, 330.

<sup>66</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 59.

the sexual temptations that arise. Wilson and Hoffmann note, “Nothing is more essential as ministers than our vibrant personal relationship with the One who both called us and sustains us. Without it, we have nothing to offer of any real value to anyone.”<sup>67</sup> It is vital that pastors recognize the spiritual realities of their life. This involves growing in personal relationship with Christ, yielding to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is not just following certain practices like prayer, Bible reading, worship and so forth. It is connecting with God in a deep personal way, walking with Him. “The most miserable people in the world are Christian leaders whose intimacy with God has gone cold. And it’s so easy to let that happen by becoming consumed with the ‘rituals’ of our duties.”<sup>68</sup> *Pastors at Greater Risk* affirms this by stressing that what is needed is spiritual renewal and restoration.

The compelling demands of ministry can easily erode one’s spiritual strength. “Personal time with God is usually the first thing that goes in our busyness.”<sup>69</sup> One of the symptoms of burnout observed by London and Wiseman is spiritual dryness or emptiness. “One helper of pastors believes clergy burnout is more often than not a crisis of faith because the minister gives too much for too long without continual replenishment.”<sup>70</sup> Sabbath keeping or re-creation, a term coined by Wilson and Hoffmann, plays an important role in restoring and regenerating pastors. When pastors do not take the time and make the effort to engage in Sabbath rest and renewal, creativity and energy are lost with the pastor just having enough energy to cope with what is immediately in front of him/her. “If we don’t replenish our spent energy through re-

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<sup>67</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 43.

<sup>68</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 41.

<sup>69</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 272.

<sup>70</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 207.

creation, our body may eventually respond with physical ailment or burnout, or our congregation or board may respond in the form of ministry removal, or the demons crouching at our door will respond with temptations toward moral failure.”<sup>71</sup> Thus it is vital for pastors to be spiritually replenished in order to facilitate carrying out God’s purposes in his/her life.

### **Self Care – Stress Management**

Stress and burnout are factors contributing to sexual misconduct. In discerning factors that influenced his obsessive search for escape through sex, Ryan noted, “high stress was one trigger that caused me keen vulnerability.”<sup>72</sup> Stress is an inevitable part of our life here on earth and is actually a necessary component in order for us to respond to pressures within the environment. The issue is not the amount of stress one is under but rather on one’s ability to manage stress. “Stress isn’t the real problem; rather, it’s the mismanagement of stress that wreaks havoc on so many ministers.”<sup>73</sup> When stress is not managed well it can lead to fatigue, burnout, depression as well as having negative consequences on one physically. “It appears that stress plays a critical role in not only the physical and emotional health of ministers but also their behavioral health as well.”<sup>74</sup> The top eight areas of stress for pastors, noted in *Pastors at Greater Risk* are: “time, boundaries, isolation, conflict, mobility, life in parsonage, concern for children and spouse, and family dynamics.”<sup>75</sup> London and Wiseman cite a study coming out of Harvard Medical School, that identified four A’s as the consequences of too much stress and burnout.

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<sup>71</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 182.

<sup>72</sup> Ryan, *Ashamed No More*, 52.

<sup>73</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 100.

<sup>74</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 52.

<sup>75</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 172.

The first is *arrogance*, where the pastor says ‘I can make it, and I can do it myself; I don’t need anyone else.’ And that person begins to make his own rules. The second is an *adventurous addiction*, where the person becomes taken up – excited and energized – by what he’s doing. The third is *aloneness*. That’s the point where the pastor is at risk for depression because he cuts himself off from other people. And the fourth is *adultery*, where he begins to see sex as the only thing that can give a real kick. He turns to sex to make up for the sense of loss in his life.<sup>76</sup>

Need for acceptance and approval of others along with drivenness and perfectionism exacerbates one’s level of stress. In attempting to be a good pastor, the inclination can be towards workaholism, neglecting one’s family and personal care. “Most pastors’ work schedules are so out of balance that they will not pay attention to what’s going on inside them. Therefore, they tend not to take care of themselves emotionally. When there is no balance in their lives, the potential for anesthetizing is heightened.”<sup>77</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann suggest a key component in managing stress is to put in place various safeguards.

Part of stress management involves establishing appropriate boundaries. Boundaries help protect what is essential, especially in regards to one’s calling and intimate relationships. Pastors can leave no space in their lives and as a result become overloaded. “Often, pastors think they’re being godly by overextending themselves, when in fact they’re compulsive and driven by something in their background that has little to do with godly qualities.”<sup>78</sup> This stressful state often leads to physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual impairment. The circle comes back around to family of origin issues that are not understood and addressed. As whole human beings all these things are connected. “Practicing the disciplines of faith, practicing self-care as an under-shepherd

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<sup>76</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 179.

<sup>77</sup> Laaser and Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 118.

<sup>78</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 221.

will keep us spiritually healthy so we will have what it takes to respond to each assignment God gives us.”<sup>79</sup> Pastors need to recognize the unique work they do and see the value in establishing boundaries and learn to recharge and replenish themselves so they can faithfully serve God’s people.

In trying to discern what was happening in his life Charles Ashworth notes the effect stress had on him, realizing that “normally, when my mind was not rubbed raw by stress”<sup>80</sup> he was able to process and deal with troubles with an appropriate spiritual response. Rather than taking the time to grieve and process the death of his wife, he continues to work, pushing himself to the degree that he ends up crossing sexual boundaries he normally would never have considered crossing.

### **Abuse of Power**

A factor noted in these five books is the issue of power. “Misuse of power underlies all forms of sexual compromise.”<sup>81</sup> Pastors need to be aware of the power imbalance and connection that develops due to the pastoral role. “A parishioner may be assigning power to the clergy role even if the clergy person, at a personal level, does not feel empowered.”<sup>82</sup> Pastors are entrusted with immense influence and power; to violate the vulnerability of a congregant is to abuse that power.

Allowing oneself to be vulnerable has the potential to promote growth in relation to God and to others, but it can also be used for personal advantage when a pastor oversteps his/her power of influence. “The potential for an abuse of power in the sexual realm arises from the special nature of sexual vulnerability. In no aspect of human

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<sup>79</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 25.

<sup>80</sup> Howatch, *Absolute Truths*, 356.

<sup>81</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, v.

<sup>82</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 73.



existence are we more vulnerable than in the sexual dimension.”<sup>83</sup> Seeking help and comfort from a pastor, congregants share the deepest part of themselves, being susceptible to the pastor’s influence. “Congregants who turn to their pastor for spiritual comfort or direction step into the realm of one-sided intimacy with him. They become vulnerable, entrusting to the minister the power of influence, with the anticipation that he will become an agent of God’s provision for their need.”<sup>84</sup> This can be seductive to a pastor. To be admired, looked up to, and experience a special bond, can unleash inappropriate sexual desire.

Abuse of power can also be in response to personal attitudes, such as believing that women are inferior and are to be submissive. “All too often gaining sexual access is a way of testing whether one has power over women.”<sup>85</sup> With the growing number of women in positions of power men can feel threatened. However, men are not the only ones to feel threatened and abuse power. Female clergy have “acted out sexually with men under their power. This situation, too, can indicate a search for equal power through sex.”<sup>86</sup> An imbalance in power exists between pastors and congregants. Being aware and guarding this boundary is imperative.

### **Conclusion**

Reinforced in all these books is the myth, ‘This won’t happen to me!’ But “moral and ministry failure can happen to any of us and it happens all the time.”<sup>87</sup> “Every pastor is subject to temptation. Pastor author Bill Perkins says, ‘If you think you can’t fall into

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<sup>83</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 90.

<sup>84</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 90.

<sup>85</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 45.

<sup>86</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 45.

<sup>87</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 1.

sexual sin, then you're godlier than David, stronger than Samson, and wiser than Solomon."<sup>88</sup> Not being aware of this reality places pastors in peril. London and Wiseman astutely point out, "all sin begins with deceit."<sup>89</sup> Charles Ashworth, commenting about another pastor says, "He was a gifted man who had weaknesses which made him vulnerable."<sup>90</sup> As the story develops you see Charles needed to realize this comment for himself. Being aware of one's vulnerability is crucial. Problems occur when pastors do not watch out for potential problems, establish safeguards, or pay attention to their own inner world. Unfortunately "we all possess a condition that is potentially destructive."<sup>91</sup> It is important, therefore, to discuss this topic and inform pastors of the dangers and their own proclivity to cross sexual boundaries.

A common comment in these books is the awareness that pastors need to have regarding their susceptibility to sexual sin. "No one – not even a dedicated servant of God – is automatically exempt from the pull of thought of an illicit sexual encounter."<sup>92</sup> By being alert to this problem, acknowledging they are not above this pull, and being self-aware, pastors can and must put in place support systems and see when to flee from potentially dangerous situations. This includes understanding sexual attraction and being attuned, not only to what may be transpiring in the life of the other person, but also to one's own feelings. Asking "Am I attracted, is this stroking some need within me?" Suggestions for prevention involve not only understanding the risk factors but putting into place safeguards and practices.

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<sup>88</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 240.

<sup>89</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 94

<sup>90</sup> Howatch, *Absolute Truths*, 24.

<sup>91</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 99.

<sup>92</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 131.

It is important for pastors to work through past issues. This takes real honesty and humility, acknowledging one's brokenness. It also requires help from others as "we are never saved or healed through our own strength."<sup>93</sup> To prevent possible problems Laaser and Earle suggest establishing a plan of accountability. Grenz and Bell also underline the importance of becoming accountable, commenting: "pastors who would minister with moral integrity do well to foster relationships with people who will offer lines of accountability."<sup>94</sup> This can consist of other clergy, some other outside support system, or a personal mentor. Wilson and Hoffmann also stress the importance of accountability stating that, "One of the fastest roads to moral failure in ministry is lack of accountability."<sup>95</sup> However, unless there is honesty and transparency there is no point to an accountability relationship.

It is important to consider all the risk factors. "Any of these areas emphasized in isolation are possibly doomed to failure."<sup>96</sup> Pastors need to be educated in regards to issues such as managing stress, establishing good boundaries, and maintaining their spiritual life. There also has to be an emotional awareness and growth for "being out of balance can lead to inappropriate emotional relationships that can become sexualized."<sup>97</sup> If there are emotional gaps and psychological distress no amount of education will be preventive. In *Absolute Truths* redemption occurs through Charles being honest with himself, in receiving the support of a trusted mentor, addressing family issues and re-

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<sup>93</sup> Laaser & Earle Jr., *The Pornography Trap*, 176.

<sup>94</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 137.

<sup>95</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann, *Preventing Ministry Failure*, 45.

<sup>96</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 14.

<sup>97</sup> Thoburn and Baker, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 37.

establishing his faith in God. He found “a perfect journey, endured by the perfect alignment of the ego with the inner self where the immanent God dwelt.”<sup>98</sup>

In considering these salient sources it is clear that one cannot assert there is only one thing that contributes to pastoral sexual misconduct. The problem arises from a variety of factors, some internal some external. Pastors “need to give attention to the entire spectrum of their personal and developmental issues.”<sup>99</sup> It is the interaction of these factors that can collide contributing to vulnerability of pastoral sexual misconduct. There are a variety of elements that combine in creating this pothole. Given struggles in one’s inner life, certain conditions, and available opportunity the stage can be set for sexual sin.

To gain further understanding to see how this transpires practically in the lives of pastors, information is gleaned through personal interviews of therapists and pastors.

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<sup>98</sup> Howatch, *Absolute Truths*, 571.

<sup>99</sup> Friberg and Laaser, *Before The Fall*, 82.

## CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEWS

For the practical component of this thesis-project, five therapists and seven pastors were interviewed. The pastors were from Canada and the United States, and involved in a variety of protestant denominations. Four of the pastors were male, one female, all having crossed sexual boundaries as defined by their denomination. The therapists were also from Canada and the United States, each having counseled pastors, and each coming from a Christian faith perspective.

The questions posed to the participants were reviewed by a social researcher in order to ascertain if the questions were appropriate to elicit the information desired. An intuitional review board approved the questions. The participants were contacted by email, setting up a time to meet. The pastors were given an informed consent letter to sign, providing assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. Ten of the interviews were done in person and two took place via electronic calls such as Skype and FaceTime. The interviews lasted an hour at which time I took notes as they shared. The counselors were all asked the same questions allowing for an opened ended response. The pastors were asked open-ended questions pertaining to them as ministry professionals who had fallen sexually. They each were asked the same set of questions. The responses noted are summarized using the words of this author, but specifically quoted when pertinent.

The therapists interviewed will be referred to using the Roman Numerals 'I' through 'V' and the pastors interviewed will be referred to using 'A' through 'H'. The information given from the counselors is integrated whereas the information provided by the pastors is individually noted. Specific details have been omitted to retain the pastor's

confidentiality. I am very grateful to the therapists for being willing to give up some of their time to discuss this issue and for the pastors being open and vulnerable to share their stories. The thoughtfulness and insights provided by these two groups have facilitated a greater understanding of the problem and contributing factors to sexual sin in the pastorate.

### **Interviews with Christian Therapist/Counselors**

#### **How many years have you been in practice?**

The range of years in practice was from seventeen to thirty-eight years, two of them being involved in counseling for twenty-eight years.

#### **What percentage of your practice deals with clergy?**

The percentage range was six to one hundred, with the average for three of them being twenty percent.

#### **What percentage of the clergy you counsel has fallen sexually while in ministry?**

For counselors II<sup>1</sup>, III<sup>2</sup>, and V<sup>3</sup> all of their clergy clients have succumbed to sexual temptation. For counselor I, this constitutes only ten percent of the clergy with whom he works and for counselor IV<sup>4</sup> sixty percent of the clergy he sees deal with sexual issues and of those sixty percent half use pornography compulsively.

#### **What are some recurring themes you see amongst these clergy?**

1. Marital dissatisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Person-to-person interview by author, June 11, 2014 (name and location for all interviews are withheld to protect confidentiality).

<sup>2</sup> Person-to-person interview by author, September 10, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> FaceTime Call by author, April 20, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Person-to-person interview by author, September 19, 2014.

For therapist I<sup>5</sup>, marital dissatisfaction was a major recurring theme amongst the clergy he counsels. Issues of sexual discontent, emotional detachment, and lack of meaningful connection in marriage were common. Loss of spousal relationship or absence of a relationship was viewed by III as a common theme amongst clergy. The other therapists did not put as much emphasis on the impact of a marriage as a recurring theme though it was noted with other contributing factors as effecting sexual misconduct.

## 2. Lack of adequate boundaries.

All the therapists mentioned lack of adequate boundaries in regards to personal and professional life as a recurring theme. Professionally, clergy have risks, as their relationships are quite broad. They see people in hospitals, counseling sessions, special family events, and intimate worship times. In entering into these personal spheres normal professional boundary lines are blurred. When one shares dreams, hopes, or struggles an emotional intimacy develops.

Personal boundary lines tend to be pushed. Clergy are riddled with the disease of perfectionism, trying to be all things to all people. They wear more hats than they are capable of and feel they have to have all the answers on a variety of issues. In trying to do these things they often feel like a failure of everything.

## 3. Secrecy and lies

The clergy counseled tended to justify behavior and fail to disclose certain things. Pastors are often lone-rangers and are competitive with one another so avoid sharing not only with friends, but also with another pastor. Counselor V noted that with sexual indiscretion in ministry there is a need for secrecy and secrecy fuels an addiction. Due to shame and denial sin goes underground. The resulting problem is that within secrecy

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<sup>5</sup> Person-to-person interview by author, June 1, 2014.

sinful behaviors can be cultivated and grow. III notes that at the core of all addictions are lies; lies to self about the addiction and lies to others to keep the addiction going. IV noted that there tends to be denial that the problem exists so it runs rampant.

#### 4. Emotional State

Early emotional issues such as abandonment and rejection are often observed as contributing issues. V finds that many may not have deep emotional issues but life is stressful and people seek out ways in which to cope. The stresses of ministry often take its toll and pastors who do not have the necessary tools and support often turn to sex in order to unwind, nurture themselves, or gain some level of excitement.

#### 5. Pornography

For counselor V pornography is a recurring theme. The use of pornography often begins as an effort to change one's inner state and is appealing as it can be done on one's own terms, is quick and easy, and they view it as not cheating on their spouse. One of the problems with pornography is that it triggers a need for more and more to get the same effect on one's inner state. This opens pastors up to higher risk behavior and acting out, such as visiting strip clubs and massage parlors.

### **What do you see as the common factors contributing to sexual misconduct?**

#### 1. Opportunity.

Pastors have a lot of unstructured time as well as time alone, which makes it easy to do things in secret. Often there is a lack of accountability and oversight. With pornography there is an anonymity, affordability, and easy access, as all it takes is the click of a mouse. There is also a lot of time that can be spent with someone collegially.



A pastor may think “we were just friends,” not paying attention to the growing attraction that is occurring.

## 2. Emotional needs.

As humans we have a desire to be wanted. We long for connection so when this is not occurring pastors can manage for a while but then when something changes in their life (for example church board difficulties or unhappy congregants) they seek to fill that missing void. When a pastor is dealing with emotional issues, the opportunities at hand can place him/her at risk. When an emotional connection occurs this is what leads to a physical relationship. The problem is when this connection transpires within the context of an inappropriate relationship. III sees the emotional piece as a contributing factor for those who have affairs, but that it does not have the same bearing for those whose struggle is addiction to pornography. Counselor V also commented on this, noting that pastors who become involved with another person were attracted to them because of their nurturing and care, stroking their ego, whereas the involvement with pornography tends to be an escape, focused more on lust.

The counselors noted that sometimes the problem is an intimacy dysfunction, where there is an inability to observe and express feelings. There can also be a lack of healthy friendships, either from lack of time, relational ability, or fear of rejection. Fear, shame, and isolation are things counselor III sees over and over as he counsels pastors.

## 3. Family of origin.

Issues stemming from one’s family of origin are noted as strong contributing factors for pastors acting out sexually. These issues tie into the emotional aspects of one’s life. Unresolved identity issues, not knowing who one is (self-differentiation) are

important to consider. Counselor II commented that when a person is self aware, they do not need a set of rules to protect them, such as not taking someone out for coffee in order to “protect” himself or herself.

If there are core family of origin issues resulting in a lack of connection with God, self, and others these need to be addressed. When there is shame at a core level the response is denial and lack of understanding. To prevent acting out in inappropriate ways problems need to be deconstructed and torn apart before one goes into ministry.

#### 4. Performance mentality.

Unrealistic demands are often placed on pastors and pastors want to be accepted. Pastors tend to preach in certain ways and do things the way others want, often feeling like everyone has to “like me.” Depletion results because of over-extending and over-performing. III notes that for clergy, career fear is accentuated more than in most careers. There is a heightened fear and heightened shame. In response to this fear pastors will isolate from friendships and real vulnerability, not wanting to expose flaws and trust others. This only exacerbates the problem as fear and shame incubate in the caldron of isolation.

Clergy desire to be significant, important, powerful, wanted, and to rescue others. When these elements are their driving force and they end up feeling like they can never do enough, are underappreciated, or face personal criticism, resentment builds and they seek to do things to find fulfillment for themselves.

#### 5. Personality issues.

Another common factor observed was in regards to personality issues. Weakness, passivity, a compulsive personality, and inadequate social skills were some of the issues

noted. These clergy tended to be more impulsive, seeking need gratification, drawn in with feelings versus more led by thoughts. Also observed was an ego defectiveness where one seeks power, status, and money, thinking; “In order to be okay, others need to serve me.”

Other items noted by the counselors, but not expounded upon were: disappointment with marriage, profound disappointment in relationships with others, church, and God. Another factor noticed was a measure of arrogance. Pastors are often unwilling to get help, thinking it is up to them to be good and to do it all. This kind of arrogance can easily lead to misconduct.

**Is there one factor that stands out above all the others?**

For therapist I, he suggests that a big factor is that the opportunity is there, especially in regards to the ease of using pornography. The allure of pornography is that it seems to offer satisfaction; it is not subject to a real relationship and is available on demand. He sees pornography as an entry point for those engaging in sexually addictive behavior and that there is a relationship between pornography and affairs. Pornography is a contributor to the sexualized portion of the person and presents a threshold to do things with a real person.

The one factor that stands out for II, III, IV, and V is the stress of ministry. With the many demands placed on a pastor they can feel incompetent, and vulnerable. It was noted that in ministry one cannot really be “successful” and when things are difficult a pastor has trouble trying to know where to turn. Pastors can feel as if there is no safe place for them to go. The pastoral setting does not create an environment that supports health and well-being. Counselor I points out that in response to increasing demands a

pastor can seek to fulfill his/her own needs thinking, “my personal needs are more important than my spouse or ministry.” In seeking to unwind and escape from the stress poor choices can be made.

**In looking towards prevention what key areas would you caution pastors to consider?**

1. Attend to primary relationships.

Making sure the marriage relationship is growing emotionally and sexually is important. As well, it is critical to help pastors get on the right path to being with, receiving support, and developing strong family relationships. Pride and thinking you have to care for yourself get in the way of deepening relationships. If you are always in a control position you never are in the receiving position and it costs you love.

In attending to strengthening relationships, counselor II saw the value of understanding neuro-physiology. He noted that by understanding the difference of male and female brains, pastors could be more at ease with the other sex, understanding differences so they are not afraid of the other. Grasping an appreciation for the differences of the way men and women are wired mitigates fear, which he noted is “the lubricant of violence.”

2. Avoid that which is extraneous.

Pastors must have an understanding of the importance of avoiding opportunities as much as possible and staying away from someone when attracted to them. It is prudent to pay attention to what one discusses, how much is shared, and how much time is spent with that person. Guarding one’s mind, not engaging in inappropriate conversations, and viewing pornography need to be avoided. It means being honest,

careful, and having boundaries put in place, thus making sure it doesn't become a special relationship in a wrong kind of way.

### 3. Have safe and good accountability relationships.

Pastors need safe people that know them, flaws and all. They need people with whom they are close enough to share their internal world, people whom they respect and talk to regularly. Prevention is rooted in truth telling and grace giving. If pastors do not have safe people with whom they can share about their deepest darkest shadows they are not ready to proclaim the light of the gospel. It is difficult to understand how efficacious grace is when one feels too much shame and fear to express their inner darkness. We understand grace when we can tell the truth about our darkest secrets. When pastors have people that know them inside and out it provides a resource to help them through the pressures of ministry and is most likely to help with prevention of misconduct.

Counselors I, IV, and V noted accountability relationships as important for prevention. It is helpful to have people in pastors lives with whom they can be completely transparent; people with whom they can be vulnerable, explore feelings, and share weaknesses. Counselors II and III, however, sense that accountability is not the way to go as people tend to find ways to bypass honesty.

Having denominational support was also stressed in regards to maintaining a healthy spirituality, key relationships with family, and receiving church support. Denominations can also assist with education in regards to prevention.

### 3. Learn how to deal with stress.

Since a precursor to sexually acting out is stress and a high-risk environment, pastors need to learn how to process and deal with these factors. They need to build up a core

resiliency and healthy relationship skill competency. From this position they can develop a life plan and establish core values. By working through issues such as grief, perfectionistic performing mentality, post traumatic stress, family history, codependent tendencies, fear of abandonment, and sexual attitudes, pastors can heal, learn, and grow so they thrive at the core.

**Do you have any other items not discussed that you think would be helpful for this thesis-project?**

1. Clergy specific.

To truly be preventative it has to be clergy specific. It needs to address the extra measures of fear and shame that pastors carry and the nature of the pastoral profession in family and church life. Understanding is needed that he/she is a professional who is part of the intimate joyful and sad moments of everyone's life.

2. Theology of imperfection.

We need a theology of handling imperfection and inerrant behavior, understanding at the core it is not about sex. Perfectionism is the modeled theology in the church. How do men and women handle their perfectionism of role? Can public figures make mistakes and just be human? As a result of the fall, humans are flawed and need to honestly face weaknesses. One must realize this truth and that pastors are susceptible like everyone else. Honesty and grace need to be a preventative piece. Some churches, in denying this reality, assume their pastor will not commit clergy sexual misconduct and thus do not initiate policies around Internet use. An awareness of the potential problems, educating others to the complexities of ministry, and being attentive can assist in prevention. What is needed is an infrastructure and systems that are balanced and relational.

### 3. Self Awareness

It is vital to be self-aware, staying in touch with one's brokenness, trigger points, feelings, and struggles. Pastors need to address any issues of shame in their lives understanding where this originates. They also need to look for warning signs and prevention factors that have to do with both internal things and external things. People are human and so have needs to alter their states; understanding this and examining one's places of vulnerability will help to put necessary boundaries in place and avoid problems. To help facilitate an understanding and awareness of self, therapists and therapist support groups can provide insight and practical ways to keep working on personal issues.

## INTERVIEWS WITH PASTORS

### **How long ago did your sexual misconduct take place?**

For five of the pastors their misconduct took place over seven years ago. For one it was from three to five years and the other was between five and seven.

### **How many years were you in ministry prior to the misconduct?**

- A. Nine years<sup>6</sup>
- B. Two years<sup>7</sup>
- C. Thirty years<sup>8</sup>
- D. Sixteen years<sup>9</sup>
- E. Seven years<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Male, married. Person-to-person interview by author, July 27, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Female, single. Person-to-person interview by author, June 29, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Male, married. Skype call by author, November 14, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Male, married. Person-to-person interview by author, August 16, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Male, married. Person-to-person interview by author, October 14, 2014.

F. Seven years<sup>11</sup>

G. Full time for two years, part time for four years<sup>12</sup>

**Briefly describe the nature and duration of the sexual misconduct.**

A. The relationship began as a close friendship; they were not dating but spent time together, sharing struggles and joys on a deep level. During one particularly stressful, exhausting weekend, when a roommate was away, they slept together. As a result of this sexual encounter she became pregnant. They confessed what happened and that she was pregnant to those with whom he was accountable. Discipline occurred but without any support or guidance.<sup>13</sup> The couple married and they have remained married to this day.

This couple had been friends for several years, doing things together and talking about what was going on in their lives. They had not crossed any sexual boundaries previously but he noted that they were often on the edge of not going too far. He was a single man in ministry often pursued by other women. For many years he had said ‘no’ to the various women who were sexually pursuing him, but on this occasion, with a close friend, his guard was down and he gave in to the sexual temptation.

B. The nature of this sexual misconduct was two affairs. The first one began as an emotional affair that lasted for several months and then ended with a one night sexual liaison. The ending of this affair was not due to the realization that the actions were sinful and not God’s best for them, but rather due to situations regarding their spouses. In this case the pastor was female and married, and the wife of the man with whom she had

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<sup>11</sup> Male, married. Person-to-person interview by author, June 13, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Male, married. Person-to-person interview by author, June 28, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Discipline following sexual sin in the pastorate is not expounded upon in this thesis-project, as the focus is on preventing the misconduct from occurring. In the interviews, however, the topic of discipline arose and is helpful in gaining an understanding of their journey.



the affair, had a baby a day or two after their sexual encounter. She had also agreed to work on things with her spouse so even though there was a desire to continue the affair, focus had to shift back to their spouses.

The second relationship lasted for about eight months. This was with another pastor who pursued her. He was a charismatic leader but very needy and came to her for love and comfort. With her marriage on the rocks this attention was welcomed and appreciated but she knew this was wrong and not the kind of relationship she wanted. At times she felt trapped, not having the personal power to get out of this relationship. She tried once after about three months but he threatened suicide. The affair finally ended when he was in a better spot and also realized the need for the relationship to end.

C. The illicit relationship this pastor had began with counseling a female congregant. As the two of them met to discuss the issues going on in her life, an emotional connection was established. As time went on this progressed to mutual physical hugging, on to more intimate touching, and then progressed not to intercourse but to oral sex. The relationship continued to increase to the point where they were considering leaving their spouses. It was at this point the church discovered the indiscretion and stepped in.

He also shared that there was sexual misconduct that took place early on in his ministry. This occurred about five years after he began his career and was with someone who was also involved in ministry. This relationship also began with an emotional connection. He commented that it was not something he was pursuing, but something that he “fell into.” When he realized he was in too deep with sexual touching he was already emotionally connected.

**D.** The nature of this pastor's indiscretion began with the soliciting of prostitutes. He never slept with any of the prostitutes but enjoyed the thrill of interacting and inquiring about a sexual connection. His first sexual imprinting incident occurred along these lines in college. He and some friends went down to an area frequented by prostitutes. While there one of the prostitutes came over to their car and flashed her breasts at them. This ended up being a key moment for him feeling the power of sexuality. It was to this rush that took him back years later, while in ministry, to prostitutes. He would negotiate with them, fondle, then masturbate and go home. This lasted for several months but then one day he ended up soliciting an undercover officer.

**E.** On-line pornography was the initial problem for this pastor, which escalated in him acting out by going to massage parlors. He had struggled with pornography off and on beginning during his teen years. When stress mounted and the opportunity arose he would take advantage of viewing pornography late at night. This late night viewing went on for several years and then progressed to some on-line interaction. As he engaged in this behavior it fueled a desire for interaction with something more real. On the sites he visited, massage parlors were advertised freely, so one day he decided to call a local massage parlor. Over the course of a few months he frequented these parlors.

**F.** The contact this pastor had with a woman began as friends, and with him trying to help her work through struggles she had with her husband, specifically her husband's struggle with pornography. They began spending more and more time alone apart from their spouses. The sexual component of their relationship included phone calls and many inappropriate sexual emails. He kept pushing for direct physical contact but it did not occur.

**G.** His indiscretion was Internet pornography, fantasy, and masturbation. When he first got involved it was early on in the Internet world. When he purchased his first computer the viewing of pornography was at first just an illicit curiosity. As time went on, however, it was like a claw that came out of computer and sucked him in. He found he had no defenses and became sexually addicted to pornography.

**Were there stresses in your ministry during this time?**

**A.** The resounding response to this was yes. He had taken on a lot of responsibility, part of which included providing oversight to one hundred leaders. He was going to resign but the other person he was working with was having difficulties and ended up resigning first. He was burnt out, exhausted, and asked for accountability but did not receive any support.

One recurring problem he had was that he was a single pastor and some of the single women were coming to his home at night wanting to spend time with him. He asked for help from the board but they did not comprehend the difficulty of this situation and did not take his struggles seriously. He was dealing with the pressures of being a single Christian man and was crying out for help.

**B.** Her response was “no,” ministry was busy but not especially stressful. The major stress was in regards to her marriage.

**C.** Both times when he acted out sexually there were stresses. As he looked back he could see he was in burnout mode. In both instances he crossed boundaries but at that time did not know why. The core cause of his stress was that he felt like he should be on call 24/7 for his parishioners. He put church work first, and had self-care and spiritual care at the bottom of the list.

**D.** There were enormous stresses in his life at that time. He was involved in a strategic church move, he was in a high profile position, and there were lawsuits pending against him. These lawsuits were not for any sexual indiscretions but for his role in the sale and move of the church. He noted that at times he feared for his life.

**E.** He did not see anything beyond what he considered normal for pastoral ministry. He had moved to a position in a small town church, which was very different from what he had experienced previously. He found he had a lot of free time, he tended to be bored, felt lost, and generally found himself less engaged. He said the issue was with him personally not with any stress at the church.

**F.** The response was “very much.” He came into his ministry position after teaching for many years and found within this new ministry context dealing with frustration and boredom. The main frustration was in terms of his leadership role and he began to question whether he wanted to be there or not. One thing that figured highly in his misconduct was looking for meaning and purpose.

**G.** He had been fired from ministry and this threw him for a loop in terms of his own identity and in terms of who God was. He wondered if had he just wasted the last few years of his life. He felt defenseless and angry with God. As he looked at pornography his conscience was seared, pushing moral guilt aside, he decided “I am diving into this and I just do not care.” He referred to it as being like a drug where he didn’t have to think about all that was happening. It also gave him a sense of power with the thought, “I am a man and here is something that feeds me.” With pornography and fantasy he saw someone willing to give herself to him so therefore thought he was good enough to be on the receiving end.

It took a long time for him to face what was going on underneath. Realizing that it was not about sex, but that it was broader and deeper. His underlying question was, “will someone love me?” The pornography and fantasy had an addictive quality to it and found he needed to ramp it up in order for it to give the same rush.

**How would you describe your spiritual health around the time of the event?**

**A.** He described himself as being terribly weary. He was caught up in the busyness of ministry and found himself giving out, but not receiving. He did enter into an accountability relationship with another man a few years older. This man was able to offer some suggestions, but not able to offer the degree of support he needed. One concept presented to him through this individual was the idea of life being made up of three tanks – spiritual, emotional, and physical, noting that if you do not fill up spiritually with what God has for you then you start to drain the other tanks. He understood this but did not know how to fill the tanks. He did not know how to be alone with God and was doing ministry to earn God’s favor. He now can see he was tapping into the physical to fill up the spiritual.

**B.** She could see she was focused more on performance, on trying to measure up and earn approval. She was teaching a Bible study but sensed there was a part of this that was just cognitive, not sharing her heart and experiencing God at a deep level. She was not in a state of unbelief, but wouldn’t say there was a close, loving relationship with God. It was more just going through the motions, working for God.

**C.** He described it as “very poor.” In his mind because of working so hard for God he thought it was good, but in reality he was neglecting his spirituality. He was

doing what God wanted him to do and working intensely, but the relationship was poor. He was doing for Christ but not being in Christ.

**D.** His spiritual life at that time was very unhealthy and he was work addicted. He did not understand spirituality to be something that had an emotional content or one that was truly relational. For him it all seemed to boil down to do's and don'ts. There was guilt that he carried for not reading the Bible the way he should, not worshipping like others, and so forth. He couldn't experience God being there for him; he had to be there for God.

**E.** His spiritual life was inconsistent and sporadic. Looking back at it now, he sees that it was poor whereas at the time he thought it was satisfactory. His major struggle was not in his faith in Christ but in his trust of Him as Lord.

**F.** In a real sense he was not deeply connected. He realized he was going through the motions on the outside but was a bit lost on the inside. He grew up in a very legalistic structure and so on the surface he was doing all the right things, going through all the motions but there was a dissonance. There was a disconnection between public and private life.

**G.** He rated it as low, noting that his relationship with God was fairly cerebral and conceptual. At that time Jesus was more of an idea, not an encounter with a real person so it was easy to put him aside. There was a lack of a deep relational nature to his spiritual life. His lack of guilt and moral indiscretion was against a system rather than against a person. It was not until after dealing with his addiction he started to get in touch with deep questions about the reality of God. He learned that when one knows

there is a relationship, violating that is like betraying one's wife or kids. This perspective helped fortify him.

**How would you describe your relationship to your spouse (or other close relationships if not married) prior to the indiscretion?**

A. She was his closest friend; that was part of the problem. They had a close, non-sexual intimate friendship at first and were not married.

B. The relationship with her spouse was not positive. At times things were very strained and they did not have the conflict skills to push through and work on issues. Some counseling was attempted but they never made it for enough sessions to make a difference. For many years they were just two people living together.

C. When he entered into a burnout stage in his ministry he thought their marriage was in a very good place but things deteriorated. Generally overall, however, he was still thinking their marriage was in good shape. There were warning signs from his wife, however, that it wasn't good but he was not open to see these things. Part of the reason he could not engage in a relationship with his spouse was that he could not get in touch with his feelings. He thought he was attached but was not. Later on he came to understand that he had detachment disorder from an issue in childhood.

D. Dysfunction in regards to marital intimacy was his descriptor; he did not know how to be emotionally close with his wife. She was expressing a desire to get help for their marriage but he was at a point where he would not listen to her. He was even in denial regarding their marital relationship thinking the issues were hers not his. The relationship was distant and unhealthy.

E. Actually his relationship with his wife was quite good. It was not abusive or neglectful on the part of either of them. They were still having fun as a couple but did have the stress of children and some lack of intimacy due to caring and raising children.

F. On a scale of one to ten he would rate his marriage as a two at that point. They were having sex regularly but not communicating and there was no empathy. His need for approval did not come from his wife, rather it came from external sources. He had some great external relationships with friends that fulfilled some of his needs but he was searching for love and affection. He did not know how to handle the difference of a one on one connection and love and affection, thus creating vulnerability all the time.

G. Their relationship was actually quite good. His acting out did not have that much to do with their connection. He was getting his needs met but he did not see the effect on his wife. For her, however, his involvement in pornography was no different than an affair. He needed to see the seriousness of his involvement. This was difficult to get in touch with due to pride and shame.

**As you were growing up were there any traumatic events that took place? If so what were these?**

A. As a family they did not talk about sexuality, he learned about it from outside sources. Growing up there was a lack of affection between his parents; he observed their relationship as being more of a partnership and so could not imagine sexual activity. His dad had a nervous breakdown and disappeared for a couple of weeks. This unfortunately was never worked through as a family. He also noted that his wife experienced abuse in her past.



**B.** She could not recall any real traumatic events, but had often wondered about early childhood sexual abuse. Her parent's marriage was not very good, there were no affairs that she knew of, but their relationship seemed like one of social commitment rather than love and connection. Her dad was a workaholic and her mom had several health problems that put a strain on the family. The family remained intact but not as an integrated whole.

**C.** There was some trauma that occurred in childhood. His father left to immigrate to North America when he was very young and he did not see his father for several months. When he moved to North America both parents had shift work so the children were latchkey kids and had to take care of themselves. At one point he almost drowned and his brother saved his life. In his pre-teen years there was a one-time same-sex abuse incident. For years he repressed this memory and did not realize the impact this had on him.

He found he was vulnerable to being admired and desired by females, and it became harder to establish boundaries and say no to sex when it affirmed his male sexuality. He also noted that he was not aroused by a female unless there was a close deep connection. His sexual acting out involved oral sex, which was the way in which he was personally abused. He commented that souls connect with someone who is abused in the same way.

**D.** His father passed away when he was a young child and his mother was unable to relate and care for him and the other siblings in the family. This inability of his mother to relate to her children was an ongoing broken piece throughout his mother's life. She also tended to be inappropriate in her dress, or lack thereof around her children. Another difficult piece in his life was a feeling of loss when his older brother left for college. This

was the one stable influence in his life; he was a close friend and confidant, thus his leaving was a profound loss.

E. There were three formative factors growing up. First his mother was quite sick with mental health issues when he was a pre-teen. Second, he was close to his grandfather who passed away during a formative time in his life. Third, it was around this age that he was exposed to pornography. At first it was magazines at school that friends brought and then it was renting a movie when his parents were gone. Looking at magazines and movies involved some risk. The renting, getting from friends, and buying at a corner store added a sense of excitement. There was an attachment and sexual rush to doing something wrong and sinful. It was a secret drug that brought comfort and escape and it was to this he became addicted.

F. Family issues presented a huge area of hurt. His father died when he was young leaving a deep wound. The experience of rejection and abuse from his stepfather also left him wounded and vulnerable. He was touched inappropriately in Christian settings as a pre-teen. He did not tell anyone about these incidences until well into adulthood, stuffing the feelings of guilt, shame, and rejection. He was afraid of sexuality; probably coming from a very legalistic background. Growing up they didn't talk about sex at all, not even kissing. He commented that pornography was not an issue for him. On the surface he maintained a facade of strength and morality but internally there was self-deception.

G. He did not sense anything major in regards to trauma as he was growing up. His family were involved in church, they were all good children and did not get into trouble.

**Growing up did you feel loved and accepted for who you are?**

A. Yes, he felt accepted, mostly from his mom. His dad, however, was not

affectionate, and never hugged him.

**B.** No she did not feel truly accepted, but felt as if there was an expectation to do well and behave well in order to be loved and accepted. This is an issue for which she has continued to battle, that of not measuring up, not being loveable.

**C.** Yes, he was his mom's favorite. However, when twins were born he was displaced and they received all her attention. There was no time for him and he felt forgotten. He continued to seek feminine attention and did not really grow up in this area of his life.

**D.** Growing up he did not feel loved and accepted. After his father died his mother remarried to a very religious stepfather who had him give up family relationships that he loved and knew loved him because they were not Christians. He was cut off from relationships with extended family and other close individuals simply because they were not believers.

**E.** Yes he did feel loved and accepted. He had a pretty good childhood. He did well in school, sports, and music. As a teen he did not sleep with any girls but rather was in a fantasy world. This was something he thought he would grow out of, or a situation that marriage would fix to some degree. Once married he quickly saw that was not the case.

**F.** He would say that within his family, other than with his stepfather, he did experience love and acceptance.

**G.** Yes, but a part of the true response is that he detached from his family in pre-adolescence. This was not precipitated by an event but done over time in response to family dynamics. He did not receive male influence from his father; his dad was a good

man but was unable to attach to his children especially when they were toddlers. He never took them fishing or did any sports with them but rather waited for his boys to grow up to take them out to dinner, talk about books, work, and so forth. The result was he felt alone and, that he had to figure things out himself. He did not ask for help when he could have used it and even when he felt vulnerable he was unwilling to seek help as he thought he should be independent and able to do the right thing; it was shame to think otherwise.

**What do you think were the contributing factors as to why this occurred?**

**A.** The two key things he noted were loneliness in ministry and not feeling like he had a place where he could receive ministry from others. He was always doing things for other people and was feeling burnt out. Others around him were focused on ministry, not on how he was doing. He also found being single in the church was very difficult. He was older and wanted to be married but that had not yet occurred. He did not know how to carve out his own life as a single man and work through sexual pressures.

**B.** In the first affair it was looking for acceptance, fulfillment, and someone that genuinely cared for her. She was very attracted to this man and he was going through a similar difficult time with his wife. The marriage difficulties they both faced brought them together. With this mutual need and attraction the drive for connection took over from the drive to do what was right.

In the second affair there was loneliness as her husband had left and this person kept pursuing her until she gave in. While involved in the relationship the attention was intoxicating. She realizes there was a gap in her spiritual life as well as personal

insecurity. She lacked self-awareness, confidence, and the personal strength to refuse his advances.

**C.** He needed to get to the root of the darkness, understanding the internal mechanism within his soul that allowed him to violate God's Word. He need to deal with the abuse that had never been shared and how it affected his ability to say no for himself.

The other contributing factor was in regards to his flesh, that he thought he wanted to be a hero, saving people, but he realized at the root was a darkness that felt like, "I am dangerous and I like it."

**D.** It was relatively easy to cross sexual lines as he managed his own time, had plenty of money, and had a place that was provided for him to stay away from home when needed. He was lonely, stressed, and felt blamed by his wife for lack of closeness. Despite his wife knowing they needed help he refused, as he was too proud to seek any help. His view of self was incredibly dark and dysfunctional. He found himself constantly trying to prove that he was good enough to be a pastor.

**E.** Isolation and shame played a huge factor as to why this occurred in his life. Even as a leader in high school and college he felt isolated. In many ways he was considered a "golden child" in regards to sports and academia, this created a pressure to succeed. He knew it was wrong to sleep around and wanted to be seen as a good kid so didn't want to live a life of rebellion and partying so turned to pornography, feeling like that would not hurt anyone else. This was entered into as a safe way of escape, a fantasy world for stress relief. Pornography was free, easily accessible, and people did not notice, so he could cover up this addiction. There were times when he would refrain and then binge. He received some counseling but there was still sexual brokenness; the issues

of lust and masturbation were still present as his private vice. The secrecy and lies continued to be a trap.

Another factor that he realized during recovery was that he was suffering from depression; there was a melancholy presence in his life. This depression increased in adulthood. When he was fatigued and depressed, pornography gave an adrenaline rush. He didn't trust God to provide what he needed in this area. It became an idol to turn to for pleasure and meaning. Identity and worship issues were at the core and heart of the problem.

F. A big thing in his situation was not paying attention to the signs, ignoring them. There were red flags but he kept pushing them away. Tied into this was a lack of awareness; sharing his pain with this other woman seemed innocent, but in reality he was crossing emotional boundaries. Because of his legalistic background he looked to an older pastor to make decisions in terms of boundaries with women but he was not self aware enough to know those were not the boundaries that he needed. It was almost like permission was given to him. In the back of his mind he was thinking, "I am playing with fire" but he did not heed the warning.

In his relationship with this woman he found her giving and attentive. She was hurting, depressed, and concerned about her looks in response to her husband's pornography addiction, but rather than honestly trying to help her he was looking for connection and acceptance. Here was an intelligent, beautiful woman thinking he was great. The relationship was meeting a deep need of being accepted, giving him all the strokes he longed for. It was the deep emotional connection that was the drawing force. Layered on top of this was a sensual allurements.

**G.** He was vulnerable and didn't care. There was a lack of real connection with God and he was mad at God. Weakness and sense of failure were the driving forces.

**Is there any other information not discussed that would be helpful in discerning what could have helped prevent this from occurring?**

**A.** This pastor needed accountability and a mentor, a safe place to share problems and struggles. The sense was that no one really knew him. He was good at speaking and leading worship, but they did not know him for him. The sexual sin was in response to the burnout and depression. When he "screwed up" they discarded him.

A tension he felt was that there was no place to deal with sexual sin. As a pastor you do not share personal stories. The feeling is you have to maintain status so you hold everything back. Congregations need to know a pastor is a sexual being too. He found that when the issues of lust and death were acknowledged and had people pray over him, this was a powerful turning point.

**B.** Not knowing herself and not being in touch with her feelings contributed to her sexual failure. She saw that her marriage was a mistake; she really did not love him and was miserable but felt like she could not get out of it. Entering into this marriage was done probably due to a lack of self-esteem. She did not know if someone else would love her and did not want to disappoint others who thought this was the right person to marry.

Counseling at an early age might have prevented her marriage decision and the two affairs. Working through issues of self worth, understanding what motivated her, and maintaining a close walk with Christ would be the components for prevention.

**C.** Burnout is a key factor, involving issues such as: not addressing self-care, relationship with spouse, and closeness with God. In a state of burnout one loses reason

and ability to see the world as it really is, and can rationalize ethics. It takes energy away from being able to remain stable in one's resolve and boundaries end up being crossed. When pastors are overworked or working more than can be expected over time they can feel a sense of entitlement that they can take something that really does not belong to them. When work becomes your God this is idolatry and has sexual immorality connected with it. Work as an idol leads one down the road to destruction. A relationship with God is the priority, not what we do for Him.

For denominations to provide sabbatical times, having a way to give people a rest would be helpful. Expectations for pastors are getting higher and broader and they need to know that making work one's first priority is not godly.

Another issue for him was the belief of lies that were imbedded in wounds. He had this homosexual abuse experience, so deep down thought if he told people about this he would be called a homosexual and also that if he told, there would be repercussions.

Pornography was another factor. He was exposed to this before puberty and had no sexual stimulation. There was no strict taboo in the family towards pornography and as he had no emotions toward it at the time he didn't see the danger in it. Only after the affair did he realize the danger and how it darkened his mind.

In regards to prevention he feels it would have been helpful during his ministry training to go through his family of origin history, and to be able, within a safe place, to share sexual, physical, or emotional abuse growing up. He noted this is safer to do in seminary instead of after being ordained, as one's profession is then at risk.

Creating internal boundaries is essential. External boundaries for pastors are not enough, and do not prevent moral failure.



**D.** He had no close friends except someone else in ministry who was a sex addict himself. It seemed obvious that he was successful so he assumed the issue could not be with him. At that time he did not understand his shame or the cycle of sexual addiction so was caught in a sin/confess cycle. There was no power to stop it and he thought he was doing all he could.

**E.** He wished that more of the practical side of issues for pastors would be addressed. Ministry can be overwhelming and friendships difficult to find. Pastors need one or two people with whom they can be brutally honest. He knew he had an issue, but did not know where to go and how to deal with it. Having someone that he could be honest with would have been very helpful. He feels that pastors need a consistent counselor in their life, even when things are going well. This is like having regular maintenance on one's car. Pastors can be good at caring for others, but not caring for themselves. They need someone to graciously ask them the difficult questions and honestly care for them. There is also a need for pastors to have somewhere where they can be re-charged.

Also noted was the value of taking away the stigma of sexual sin, not that it is acceptable but where there can be disclosure without rejection so a pastor can get the help he/she needs.

**F.** As a lost boy he was vulnerable. He grew up with women in the home so in some ways was comfortable with women in that setting but did not know how to relate to women outside of that setting. He also did not know how to integrate sexuality with faith. There is a need within the church to talk about sexuality. Pastors need to be able to acknowledge vulnerability and temptation but then know how to appropriately respond,

knowing what one can and cannot do from a place of internal strength and not just a legalistic structure.

Pastors need helpful, honest spiritual direction, a place or person where they can admit struggles. Many are screaming for help but don't know where to go. Pastors are often struggling in their marriage or in their own sexuality and this needs to be brought out in the open, to help them deal with these issues. Every pastor needs to talk about not only the frustrations of his/her work, but to also have a safe place to talk about the wholeness of his/her life – sexuality, kids, marriage, finances, and spirituality.

He noted that talented, charismatic pastors are more at risk and people can be fooled as to who they are and think there is no need for support and mentoring. There is a lot of sexual energy in charisma and often these pastors are walking wounded but their giftedness covers up the woundedness and huge expectations are placed on them. Stress is an enormous factor and stressed people tend to make poor decisions. Pastors have a large capacity to feel with people, weeping, laughing, and eating together, so going over the edge to sleeping together is an easy step.

A sense of self-awareness and self-management was noted as paramount. Realizing when one has sexual feelings, when one is being flirtatious, too intimate, knowing how to control and not stuff feelings, and finding out what works for prevention is important. Part of ministry training should include discovery of past wounds and hurts.

**G.** Having intentional people who are focused on asking the hard questions would have been helpful. He had no one in his life that was willing to probe deeper. He found that he at times was the one taking conversation beyond the every day stuff. Outside support is important. The downside of support in a denomination is that you will not tell

someone who might have authority over you, so you don't tell anyone. If you are worried about being fired you are not going to share your struggles. He suggested it would be good to pair pastors up with spiritual direction and counseling, somewhere where they can share who they are and work through issues. He also sees that we need to take away the shame factor, acknowledge that people will be struggling with pornography and start there.

### **Closing Thoughts**

The conversations with these therapists and pastors were very helpful. Their honesty, transparency, reflection, and insights have helped to grasp an understanding as to why this problem of sexual sin in the pastorate occurs. There are many forms that sexual sin can take, such as abuse of minors and same gender sexual relationships. These forms of misconduct were not specifically addressed by the therapists and pastors interviewed. Thus some unique contributing factors that may be of influence were not explored. However, the interviews conducted combined with printed resources provide a solid foundation to assess the major factors contributing to sexual misconduct and how prevention can take place.

## CHAPTER FIVE: OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis-project was to unearth the major reasons why sexual misconduct occurs in the pastorate, using this information as an aid to prevention. There is a lot of helpful material presented in regards to responses and restoration after a pastor has fallen, but not as much in regards to prevention. Clergy sexual sin negatively impacts many people, not just the offending pastor, and so offering information on how to avoid this pitfall is vital.

From the information gleaned through Biblical study, a variety of resources, interviews with therapists, and interviews with pastors this author has arrived at ten key areas that need to be taken into consideration when looking at prevention. In compiling the information from all these sources a framework emerged with broader categories so some of the categories originally noted have been incorporated into others as sub sections. The majority of these areas focuses on the pastor's responsibility but also noted are two outside sources where responsibility of prevention must also be considered.

Clearly observed through this thesis-project is the fact that sexual misconduct does not occur just because of one thing, rather there is interplay of a variety of factors. A one-step-solves-all type of approach is not suitable as several components contribute to this problem. "There are many factors that contribute to the high incidence of sexual sin in the pastorate."<sup>1</sup> A holistic approach is needed, with pastors and churches becoming aware of these factors, paying attention to each one in order to stem the tide of this injurious problem.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Laaser, *Faithful and True: Sexual Integrity in a Fallen World* (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 1996), 65.

## **Education and Training**

One place prevention needs to begin is in the training and education of pastors. Many pastors commonly enter into ministry with a lack of understanding on several crucial areas, rendering them vulnerable to sexual indiscretions. To facilitate prevention, as pastors attend seminary or other formal ministry training, it is essential that key fundamentals be addressed, including: sexuality, awareness of ethical standards, an understanding regarding power and power imbalance in ministry, dynamics of transference, the role of a pastor, pitfalls related to ministry, and available resources to cope with problems that may arise.

They need to understand the nature of the power and authority of their role and the responsibility that goes with it. They need to learn how to maintain boundaries in relationship with parishioners and counselees. They need to learn to care for their own emotional and sexual needs in appropriate ways. They need to be encouraged to seek consultation with professional peers in order to avoid isolation in their pastoral roles. These aspects of preparation for ministry will help caution ‘wanderers’ from wandering and will help the otherwise conscientious pastor avoid mistakes, which can destroy his or her ministry.<sup>2</sup>

Gaining personal understanding and awareness, as well as training in perceiving and processing vital components of ministry that can obfuscate one’s mission, will help pastors avoid the sinful pitfall of sexual misconduct.

## **Church and Denomination**

A responsibility for prevention lies with the church and the denomination. “Clergy sexual failure occurs in the context of a larger family – the church – whose dysfunctional dimensions contribute to the problem. Thus the congregation must accept

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<sup>2</sup> Marie M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred? The Story of a Pastor, The Women He Sexually Abused, and the Congregation He Nearly Destroyed* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1999), 106.

appropriate responsibility for any incident of clergy sexual misconduct.”<sup>3</sup> Sexual misconduct on the part of a pastor is ultimately the pastor’s responsibility, but there are significant components that churches and denominations can put into place to help pastors. For two of the pastors interviewed, help from the church was sought before misconduct occurred; unfortunately, support was not forthcoming. In one case the pastor reached out anonymously to the church, however, not only was he unable to receive any help or support, but when they found out who sent in the request and that he was struggling with pornography, they had him fired. For both pastors interviewed, they felt that if support had been given, guiding them to work through their struggles, their sexual misconduct might not have occurred.

Churches need to be aware of the reality of the problem of sexual sin and realize that they have a responsibility for their pastor’s professional conduct. This involves understanding professional ethics and putting safeguards and boundaries in place. Within many churches there is naivety in regards to this problem. “Although the problem has existed for years, the church remains unprepared to address it.”<sup>4</sup> When churches understand the issue of pastoral sexual misconduct they can put into place policies and procedures that help guide pastors, protect those who are vulnerable, and give support when problems arise.

In working through this thesis-project, pornography repeatedly came up as a problem, not only as one of the components of sexual misconduct, but as a stepping stone to other sexual sin. In studying the issue of pornography, Davies contends that: “sexual

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 152.

<sup>4</sup> Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?* 99.

addiction can lead to clergy sexual malfeasance.”<sup>5</sup> Use of pornography is almost commonplace in this day and age and pastors come into ministry having either dabbled in it occasionally or caught up in frequent use. If churches can acknowledge this propensity and allow pastors to express their struggles, an environment can be created where it is permissible to talk about these things, breaking down the silence that fosters further problems. “The more our lives (as individuals, pastors, families or congregations) are rooted in fear and shame, the greater our risk for crisis. And, the more our lives are rooted in God’s unfailing love and grace, the greater the likelihood that our problems and failures will be brought into the light for healing before they become a crisis.”<sup>6</sup> During the interviews with the pastors the use of pornography was not specifically addressed, however, four of the seven pastors noted pornography as an issue in their lives that led to further acting out sexually. Pornography is a gateway to other problems. If churches can grasp this, work can be done to prevent the problem from escalating. As churches realize that pastors are people like them, facing struggles and temptations, they can provide the necessary care, resources, and guidance in order to prevent further problems.

Denominations can also be a helpful component in prevention. Not only do they need to have clear policies and procedures that define what misconduct or unethical behavior involves, but they also need to be proactive providing training and offering counseling resources and support when pastors are struggling. “Helping to minimize or eliminate exhaustion, depletion, overextension, and stress is a significant step in building safeguards that protect clergy from a wide range of mental health issues, including sexual

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Davies, “Clergy Sexual Addiction: A Systemic Preventative Model.” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention*, (Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis, Inc., 2003), 10:100.

<sup>6</sup> Dale S. Ryan and Dale O. Wolery, “Hope in Times of Crisis: When Pastors and Churches Need Recovery” *STEPS: A Magazine of Hope & Healing for Christians In Recovery* Winter 1999, 4.

addiction.”<sup>7</sup> Being proactive and ready to lend assistance can help mitigate the problem of sexual misconduct.

### **Biblical Understanding**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, humanity’s view of sexuality has drifted a long way from God’s original intent. What is left is a distorted view of sexuality. “One of the biggest challenges we must face today is the challenge of viewing sex from God’s perspective in order to keep it as beautiful and as fun as he intended it to be.”<sup>8</sup> It is necessary that pastors have a clear Biblical understanding of sexuality if they are to avoid sexual sin. This does not mean knowing a list of rules of what not to do, but grasping the sacredness of sexuality, understanding that “sexual intercourse is far more than a physical act; it is a *psychical* act that binds two people into a unity and reflects the very image of God.”<sup>9</sup> Sex is a mystery with something deeper transpiring than just a physical act. If sex is viewed as purely physical, something akin to eating, it can be relatively easy to dispense with sexual boundaries. From this perspective the list of biblical sins appear old-fashioned and no longer important for today. However, if sex is understood as a marvelous gift of intimacy from God to be used appropriately within the guidelines He has set forth, avoidance of what God classifies as sin, becomes important. There is a respect and a desire to follow God’s standards. Sex is held in high esteem, viewed as a gift to protect, not something of which to fear, to be ignored, to repress, to obsess over, or to cheapen as empty and meaningless.

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<sup>7</sup> Davies, *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 106.

<sup>8</sup> Earl D. Wilson, *Sexual Sanity: Breaking Free from Uncontrolled Habits* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, “Ephesians,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 275.



A part of this understanding involves grasping the connection between sexuality and spirituality. Sexuality and spirituality are inseparably linked and both involve a yearning for wholeness. “Sex is about meaning, and spirituality is about meaning. To involve one means to involve the other.”<sup>10</sup> Recognizing this powerful linkage prepares one for ways the enemy of our soul tries to distort sexuality. Sexuality embodies aspects that connect one’s relationship with God. Not only is one’s view of God and human nature misaligned when people dissociate sacredness from sexuality, but it can also render one vulnerable to detrimental ways of relating to others sexually. The Apostle Paul alerted the Roman Christians saying: “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie.”<sup>11</sup> When people’s hearts turn from God they instinctively seek a substitute. It is the truth, revering God and following His best that will bring freedom and wholeness.

While having a Biblical understanding of sexuality will not in itself prevent sexual misconduct, it provides an underpinning for why pastors are to make the effort of remaining sexually pure, not following the lies of the world. Biblical understanding also provides help in how to resist temptation. God knows the powerful influence of our sexuality and with our propensity to sin how it can be misused, and so provides helpful examples and instructions on how to deal with temptations and follow His best in regards to sexual living.

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Don’t Call it Love: Recovery from Sexual Addiction* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1992), 322.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 1:24-25a. (New International Version).

## Personal Spirituality

Pastors can unfortunately focus so much on teaching Biblical truth and doing the work of ministry they can neglect their own spiritual growth, losing touch with their daily need for Christ, not experiencing the reality of truth and intimacy with Christ deep in their souls. “Ministers have little spiritual life! Excessive demands on time, conflicts within congregations and between ministers and members, loss of personal spiritual life and loneliness account for a deep malaise within our professional and personal lives.”<sup>12</sup> All seven pastors noted that their spiritual health was low. Comments such as: unhealthy, poor, on the surface, and lack of a deep personal experience of God were expressed. This aspect of spiritual growth was a key area that contributed to their sexual misconduct.

Dale Wolery articulates this well saying:

When I deceive myself, even in doing all the right religious activities, a distance from God replaces a relationship with God. Doing religious things further hinders me because it often escalates to more and more doing. This becomes an expanding cycle of harried activity that minimizes my capacity for a relationship with everyone around me and with the Lord too. I have become so busy doing the God kind of work that I exclude the power of God’s Spirit to mold and nurture my soul.<sup>13</sup>

Developing a spirituality that is adequate to one’s calling as a pastor is of utmost importance. In order to not pretend or put on a mask of spirituality, attention must be paid to getting to know God genuinely and intimately. In the busyness of life, usually the first thing that gets pushed aside is time with God. To “be still and know” is difficult when your mind is bombarded with all that needs to be done, however, “if we have no life in Christ, we have no ministry.”<sup>14</sup> When Christ is at the center of one’s life there is

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Purves, *The Crucifixion of Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Dale O. Wolery, “Why Is Spirituality So Hard For Pastors?” *STEPS: A Magazine of Hope & Healing for Christians In Recovery*, (2004), 14:9.

<sup>14</sup> Purves, *The Crucifixion of Ministry*, 126.

stability at the core of one's being. Outside pressures that arise with church and ministry no longer have the same impact. Feelings of insecurity, loneliness, and performance mentality are replaced with security in God.

Vital for a pastor's focus is to be on his/her personal spiritual growth. This involves reading the Bible not just for the next sermon but letting it speak personally and cultivating spiritual intimacy in prayer where one not only talks to God sharing at a heart level but listening to God and experiencing His presence. A key to the life of Christ was the way He listened and then followed His Father's will. Whether after stressful occurrences or in preparation for upcoming events He often took time away from the crowd to be with His Heavenly Father. By practicing God's presence when the difficulties of life arise pastors can experience the acceptance and support they need. "Prayer rescues us from a preoccupation with ourselves and pulls us into adoration of and pilgrimage to God. Pastors, who are vocationally immersed in so much *experience* – people throbbing with pain, panicked in crisis, mired in confusion – are in particular need of such rescue."<sup>15</sup> It is in connection and communion with God that purity is possible.

### **Family Issues**

Observed throughout this thesis-project is the impact that one's family of origin and experiences growing up have on the way pastors respond and act out sexually. Six of the seven pastors noted some family issues in their past. They would not all categorize them as traumatic but all were impactful in leaving wounds. Past wounds and secrets "impairs development, frustrates problem solving, engenders shame and produces both

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<sup>15</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 103.

guilt and anxiety.”<sup>16</sup> Part of prevention involves understanding the impact one’s past has on them. Ted Roberts in an interview commented that: “It’s almost never exclusively about sex. It’s frequently about family background. The way a person thinks and processes life is a big part of the problem.”<sup>17</sup> Pastors are not above being deeply affected by painful experiences in childhood or adult life. When these pieces are buried they inevitably bubble up to the surface, often in unhealthy, unsuitable ways.

It might have been advantageous for this thesis-project to ask a more general question regarding upbringing rather than just inquiring about any traumatic events. Issues of emotional deprivation such as: lack of nurturing, encouragement, and support would have been important considerations as these elements in one’s past are linked to acting out sexually. The interviews, however, did reveal several problematic events in the past of these pastors.

It can be difficult to acknowledge the pain and dysfunction in one’s family, but to deny this reality is to bury parts of one’s interior world that remain untouched by the transforming power of God. The fact is very few people come out of their families of origin emotionally unscathed and whole. “Shame, secrets, lies, betrayals, relationship breakdowns, disappointments, and unresolved longings for unconditional love lie beneath the veneer of even the most respectable families.”<sup>18</sup> “Some therapists estimate that as many as ninety-five percent of all families are unhealthy at least to some degree.”<sup>19</sup> Four of the pastors noted that within their families they felt loved and accepted but it was

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<sup>16</sup> Imber Black, *Secrets in Families and Family Therapy* (New York, NY: Norton, 1993), 14.

<sup>17</sup> H.B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 244.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Laaser, *Faithful and True: Sexual Integrity in a Fallen World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 80.

interesting to note that of these four, three of them stated that this came only from their mother. A lack of acceptance and care from fathers was expressed in five of the pastors, including the woman pastor interviewed. Only one of the pastors commented that he felt loved and accepted by both parents.

The wounds that occur from one's past may be physical, sexual, emotional, or spiritual. Pastors must be willing to ask: what are my unresolved emotional and interpersonal issues, what roles were played in my family, were boundaries violated, was there any abuse, and were addictions present? These questions need to be honestly confronted and brought to God for healing. As "we accept and honestly evaluate our problems, we take responsibility for our own behaviors, and we ask for help when we need it."<sup>20</sup> Doing the work necessary to uncover and resolve past issues can be very difficult and takes work, but the rewards are invaluable.

### **Emotional Health**

The emotional health of pastors is not to be overlooked. Unmet emotional needs invade every area of one's life and can blind pastors from being aware of their motivation. Decisions can be made based on a desire for appreciation and acceptance rather than God-directed decisions. Outside pressure can be a trigger to a pastor who under normal circumstances would "never contemplate a sexual liaison with a congregant. However, an overwhelming crisis or a major transition in his life may tip the balance, leading him to step over the boundary into the forbidden zone."<sup>21</sup> Pastors need to wrestle with why they want to go into ministry, discerning if there are any underlying

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<sup>20</sup> Laaser, *Faithful and True*, 95.

<sup>21</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 41.

unhealthy reasons. Some pastors have unconsciously chosen ministry in an attempt to overcome childhood and trauma issues. “Those who are likely to have trouble in the future are initially attracted to the ministry often to soothe feelings of latent guilt, shame, and unworthiness, or they feel pressure to fulfill the vicarious dreams of a parent.”<sup>22</sup> “If pastors don’t intentionally resolve their past personal problems, the demands dysfunctional people bring to them will create personal burnout, stress, and depression.”<sup>23</sup> Integrating emotional health with Christian spirituality positively impacts every area of life, creating a solid foundation to withstand the stresses and strains of ministry. Two specific areas of concern that emerged in readings and interviews were low self-esteem and addictions. When a pastor has a need for approval and acceptance it affects how he/she handles conflict, intimacy and even how he/she views their own sexuality. Some emotional warning signs that should not be disregarded are: depression, loneliness, discouragement, low self-esteem, and the presence of any addictions.

One of the therapists interviewed noted that in his experience, ministers who have crossed sexual lines have struggled with some form of compulsive sexual behavior most of their lives. He, along with other sources, commented that the struggles frequently began with early exposure to porn.<sup>24</sup> The actions of one’s past are impactful in many ways. Laaser refers to acts of sexual fantasizing, masturbation, and use of pornography as building block behaviors, noting that if these comprise one’s past they “form a foundation upon which other sexual behaviors are built.”<sup>25</sup> The issue of pornography was a reoccurring theme in this thesis-project. These behaviors need to be addressed, not to

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<sup>22</sup> Rob Baker and John Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention, and Oversight* (Carefree, AZ: Gentle Path Press, 2011), 35.

<sup>23</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Laaser, *Faithful and True*, 25.

just control them but to acknowledge and deal with the source. The presence of these struggles should not preclude someone from becoming a pastor but these are red flags for which specific attention must be paid.

### **Stress**

Stress is an inevitable part of pastoral life and stress was clearly noted as a factor in sexual misconduct. Four of the five therapists interviewed cited this as the one factor that stood out to them and of the seven pastors interviewed four of them reported that stress was high at the time of sexual misconduct. “Clinical psychologists have long understood that anxiety provoking situations often arouse a person sexually.”<sup>26</sup> Stress can propel one into sexual activity, seeking release and to anesthetize oneself. Sex can become a way of coping with stressful situations. It can be seen as an escape, a way of altering one’s mood, or even viewed as a reward. Pastors therefore have to find healthy ways with which to cope with stress.

Four characteristics have emerged from studies of people who have coped well to demanding situations.

First, stress-resistant people were active in seeking solutions to challenges in their life. They did not wait for things to happen. Second, stress-resistant people were committed to a goal, which added to the meaning of life. Third, stress-resistant people made healthy life-style choices; for example they exercised regularly, used little or no alcohol, nicotine, or caffeine, and used relaxation or mediation techniques. Fourth, stress resistant people sought support from others and had supportive relationships.<sup>27</sup>

Rather than seeking to reduce stress by acting out sexually these are the measures pastors are to take. This is not easy as pastors are expected to be the caregiver. “Like all

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<sup>26</sup> Mario Bergner, *Setting Love In Order: Hope and Healing for the Homosexual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 85.

<sup>27</sup> Carnes, *Don't Call it Love*, 287.

caregivers, pastors find it easy to give care but difficult to receive care. This leads to the conditions of poor self-care, depletion, over extension, and stress.”<sup>28</sup> For prevention pastors need to find ways to nurture themselves in healthy ways, honestly express feelings, and learn how to appropriately deal with the stress that comes their way.

## **Relationship Issues**

### **Marriage**

Dissatisfaction in one’s marriage came out in many sources as a precursor to crossing sexual boundaries. “Marital conflict and lack of marital intimacy are highly correlated with sexual misconduct among pastors.”<sup>29</sup> Of the seven pastors interviewed only two felt like their marriage was quite good and not a contributing factor to the sexual misconduct. One of the pastors was single and it was his friendship with a woman that ended up crossing sexual lines. The other four shared about marital difficulties, describing the discontent as entailing a lack of connection and intimacy.

Attention must be paid to one’s primary relationships. “As powerful as the sexual component is, the behavior that the person has engaged in is more significantly about his impaired ability to develop a meaningful intimate relationship with himself, God and his significant others.”<sup>30</sup> To prevent sexual misconduct a pastor must continually focus on his/her marriage, growing in intimacy and deepening connection with their spouse, establishing a secure and caring relationship.

### **Friendships**

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<sup>28</sup> Davies, *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 101.

<sup>29</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 128.



Pastors who are “lone rangers” tend to be more at risk; “isolation does not bode well for healthy boundaries in professional relationships.”<sup>31</sup> Pastors need people in their lives who can give balance, support, and to be there when difficulties arise; people they trust, with whom they can be honest and transparent. “We all need some opportunities for consultation with those who will expect us to do and be our best, to avoid self-justification, and to remember whom we serve.”<sup>32</sup> This needs to be someone other than a spouse. It can be someone like a spiritual director, a friend outside of the church family, a therapist, or ministerial connection from another church or denomination. It is preferable to not just have one person in this category but several people with whom a pastor regularly interacts. Jesus provides an example in His relationship with Peter, James, and John; men with whom He spent time and shared His struggles.

### **Support/Accountability**

Being involved in an accountability group can aid in prevention but as noted by several therapists and pastors this is not always the case. It is easy to be part of a group and not share what is really going on in one’s life. If a pastor can find people with whom he/she feels safe, who will respond with grace, encouragement and support, and the pastor is willing to be vulnerable, these groups can be very beneficial. Isolation leads to secrecy and secrecy only perpetuates problems, so having people to whom one can turn is important. “I have found that Christians who try to play the Lone Ranger often get themselves into trouble. When faced with difficulty they do not have the support they need. Lone Christians also lack the guidance of others who will hold them responsible

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<sup>31</sup> Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?* 141.

<sup>32</sup> Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?* 141.

for their behavior.”<sup>33</sup> Support and accountability can help to mitigate the problem of pastoral sexual misconduct.

### **Nature of Pastoral Ministry**

An issue that was unexpected in working on this thesis-project was the significant impact the nature of pastoral ministry has on sexual misconduct. Pastors often think going into ministry will help them avoid sexual sin but it actually puts them in a harder place to avoid this pitfall. Pastoral ministry does not actually create an environment that supports health and well-being. Eugene Peterson points out that the environment in which pastors’ work is “dangerous and decidedly uncongenial to either personal or vocational holiness.”<sup>34</sup> He also notes that: “The conditions in which we must acquire a spirituality for our vocation – an *interior* adequate to the *exterior* – are, it must be admitted, not friendly.”<sup>35</sup> Richard Baxter cautions pastors: “take heed to yourselves because you have greater temptations and more exposure to them than other men.”<sup>36</sup> Some of the problem areas regarding the nature of ministry are: power, performance, loneliness, boundaries, and lack of Sabbath.

### **The Problem of Power**

The problem of power was not something specifically noted by the pastors interviewed, and just vaguely referred to by the therapists, but was frequently noted in

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<sup>33</sup> Wilson, *Sexual Sanity*, 121.

<sup>34</sup> Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 76.

<sup>35</sup> Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor: A Pattern for Personal Growth and Ministry*. Abridged and Edited by James M. Houston (Vancouver, BC, Canada: Regent College Printing, 2001), 35.

books and articles on clergy sexual misconduct. The temptation can be to underrate the problem of power in the pastoral role. This power is not always acknowledged and not always cautioned against. Like it or not there is an inequality in power between pastors and parishioners. “The power and authority of the pastor come from training, credentials, and gifts as well as from the contract given by the laity to the pastor.”<sup>37</sup> This power enables a pastor to fulfill his/her role but “the risk of misusing the power is a risk for all pastors. The risk is a function of the role itself, not just of the character of the pastor.”<sup>38</sup> Congregants put trust in their pastor, looking for guidance, care, and leadership. These people allow themselves to become vulnerable, opening up to a pastor’s power of influence. This vulnerability involves risks, creating a relationship between pastor and congregant that is susceptible to abuse.

As a result of power being a legitimate aspect of the role, a gap between pastor and congregant can be overlooked, not realizing the influence one has over others. Pastors need to be aware of this power differential and take steps to prevent any misuse of this power.

### **Pedestal Paradigm**

The pedestal paradigm describes churches that assume that their pastor, as their spiritual leader, is in some way “above” them. This tends to not be voiced, but is contained within the ethos of the church. Churches with this performance-based mentality expect a lot from their pastors. They expect them not only to succeed at a variety of tasks such as speaking, teaching, administration, and counseling, but they also expect them to be exemplary in their spiritual walk and all other facets of life. The

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<sup>37</sup> Karen Lebacqz, *Professional Ethics: Power and Paradox* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), 126.

<sup>38</sup> Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?* 106.

paradigmatic view is that a pastor does not, and should not, “personally wrestle, relationally struggle or spiritually fail like ordinary people often do. The pastor is the example of how things are supposed to be. The pastor’s wants and needs are not as acute as those of other people - or if they are as acute as those of others, they are more magically met by his/her close relationship with God.”<sup>39</sup> Pastors, unfortunately, buy into this, striving to do all and be all for their congregation. However, “whether real or assumed, expectations choke the vitality out of a pastor’s spirit.”<sup>40</sup> The tendency can be to ignore what is going on internally by keeping busy, and focusing on performance.

This focus on performance takes its toll. Several of the pastors interviewed commented about working hard, focusing on ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’. As a result they were burnt out and not connected emotionally. The belief was that if they only tried harder things would work out and everyone would be happy. This perfectionistic striving does not work as “ministry often repays the minister with everything but the affection, attention, and approval he so desperately desires. The ensuing frustration can lead to failure.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Loneliness**

Four of the pastors interviewed listed loneliness as a contributing factor as to why their sexual misconduct occurred. “Loneliness is an occupational hazard for pastors because so much of their work – like sermon preparation, administrative details, and personal prayer – is done alone behind-the-scenes.”<sup>42</sup> Pastors tend to have a lot of

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<sup>39</sup> Dale O. Wolery and Dale S. Ryan. “The Pedestal Paradigm,” *Ministry Health: Support and Resources for Pastors and Christian Ministry Professionals*, no. 302 (October 5, 2004), accessed September 7, 2015, <http://www.ministryhealth.net>.

<sup>40</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 49.

<sup>42</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 52.

unsupervised time, enabling them to do hospital visits, study and so forth but this can facilitate a breeding ground for an opportunity to act out sexually. “The isolation of pastors can be so complete that they come to accept loneliness as an essential part of ministry. Rather than viewing isolation as a destructive problem, it comes to be viewed as desirable and inevitable.”<sup>43</sup> The four pastors interviewed described their loneliness in ministry as feeling isolated from others. When a situation of attentiveness and closeness with someone transpired, they took the next step of sexual intimacy to fill the empty void.

This issue of loneliness is a unique problem for pastors. They can feel lonely while helping others as they do not have anywhere to turn for help with their questions and fears and they can also feel isolated by congregants who view them as separate. However, pastors can also bring this upon themselves. “The nature of ministry is such that it is easy for clergy to become emotionally isolated as well as unaccountable.”<sup>44</sup> By not wanting to admit their needs and keep themselves distant from others, loneliness is compounded. These factors of abuse of power, perfectionism, and isolation lead to crisis, damaging lives and institutions.

### **Boundaries**

It is the responsibility of the pastor to maintain boundaries in relationships with their congregants. This can be difficult as pastors share intimately in the lives of their congregants through such things as home visits, counseling, weddings, and funerals. With such intimate involvement in people’s lives, boundary lines can be blurred. While a pastor may at times feel an attraction to a parishioner, “the problem is the pastor who acts on his or her feelings of attraction to a parishioner, or the pastor who responds

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<sup>43</sup> Wolery and Ryan, *The Pedestal Paradigm*.

<sup>44</sup> Davies, *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 105.

affirmatively to a sexual initiative from a parishioner. This pastor crosses over boundaries intended to protect the pastoral relationship.”<sup>45</sup> Several of the pastors noted how they ended up crossing boundaries through intimate settings, such as counseling a parishioner.

Unlike physicians, counselors or lawyers, as a pastor you see parishioners in numerous settings as you serve them in many roles. In a short time frame, you may preach to them, counsel them, visit their homes, serve them communion, attend or participate in common athletic events, enjoy social contacts and offer comfort in times of loss. Some therapists who specialize in clergy cases believe this creates a situation where intimate relationship can develop easily.<sup>46</sup>

As “clergy who have boundary problems are at high risk of becoming sexually exploitive”<sup>47</sup> attention to this area is crucial.

### **Lack of Sabbath**

Church life can easily consume all of one’s time and energy and it can be difficult to take Sabbath. A pastor’s main workday is on Sunday, they tend to be on call 24/7, frequently attend meetings, plan services, do visitation, write sermons, perform weddings and funerals and thus it can be difficult to take Sabbath.

The demands are endless with expectations placed on pastors, not from one boss but from an entire congregation. “A congregation can and often does consume the life of the pastor. In so doing, the church unconsciously creates the kind of climate in which he becomes emotionally susceptible to sexual transgression.”<sup>48</sup> Burnout was a factor for a few of the pastors interviewed; this combined with stress and criticism from the church was a recipe for disaster.

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<sup>45</sup> Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?* 121-122.

<sup>46</sup> London, Jr. and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 107.

<sup>47</sup> Baker and Thoburn, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, 85.

<sup>48</sup> Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 152.

## Self-awareness

Self-awareness is an important component in pulling together all the aforementioned factors. Prevention necessitates self-awareness internally, being in tune and cognizant of what is going in one's emotions and thought processes, and being aware of situations that trigger negative responses. It also involves an external awareness of what is happening to others and how they are responding.

A place from which to begin is for pastors to realize that sexual misconduct could happen to them. Denying the risk of sexual misconduct, believing it will not happen to them, sets pastors up for failure. "In our eagerness to be sympathetic to others and meet their needs, to equip them with a spirituality adequate to their discipleship, we must not fail to take with full seriousness *our* straits, lest when we have saved others we ourselves should be castaways."<sup>49</sup> When pastors disregard this reality they are unprepared with their guard down, adding to their vulnerability. "If Christian leaders fall, they fall not because they forget they are holy but because they forget they are human."<sup>50</sup> The Apostle Paul warns: "So be careful. If you are thinking, 'Oh I would never behave like that' – let this be a warning to you. For you too may fall into sin."<sup>51</sup>

Pastors need to honestly look at the motives inside, asking questions like: why am I doing this, what are the feelings that I have about what is going on, and what am I thinking on the inside? It means honestly evaluating problems, taking responsibility for behaviors and seeking help and support when needed. As one pays attention to red lights flashing on the dashboard of a car, so pastors need to pay attention to areas in their life

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<sup>49</sup> Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Sandra D. Wilson, *Into Abba's Arms: Finding the Acceptance You've Always Wanted* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 85.

<sup>51</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:12 (The Living Bible).

that are red flags. This includes such things as: frequently getting sick, feeling depressed, being overtired, and withdrawing from people and work.

### Conclusion

Looking at all these factors is quite daunting. It is not an easy battle and no wonder Satan is having a field day in this area. But Christ has won the victory and pastors are not left alone to fight this battle. Jesus says in the end of Matthew's gospel: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"<sup>52</sup> The situation is not hopeless. "We are not hopelessly bound by those wounds and sins from the past that continue to shape us in our adult lives."<sup>53</sup> God is able to heal the wounds of the past and God can provide the strength needed to deal with the many challenges of ministry.

Through understanding the various factors leading to erosion, working through one's issues, seeking support, and attending to a deepening of one's spiritual life, I believe we can shore up those in ministry, preventing potholes.

Lest I should stumble  
I try not to forget  
That every hair is numbered  
Every footstep, every breath  
And this life that I'm living  
It will not end in death  
I've got a hope, I've got a hope  
I've got a hope  
That is not in this world<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Matthew 28:20b (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>53</sup> Bergner, *Setting Love In Order*, 25.

<sup>54</sup> Carolyn Arends, "I've Got A Hope." *Pollyanna's Attic* (2B Records, 2006).



## APPENDIX I

### **Interview Questions for Christian Therapist/Counselors:**

1. How many years have you been in practice?
2. What percentage of your practice deals with clergy?
3. What percentage of the clergy you counsel has fallen sexually while in ministry?
4. What are some recurring themes you see amongst these clergy?
5. What do you see as the common factors contributing to sexual misconduct?
6. Is there one factor that stands out above all the others?
7. In looking towards prevention what key areas would you caution pastors to consider?
8. Do you have any other items not discussed that you think would be helpful for this thesis-project?

## APPENDIX II

### **Interview Questions for Pastors:**

1. How long ago did your sexual misconduct take place?
2. How many years were you in ministry prior to the misconduct?
3. Briefly describe the nature and duration of the sexual misconduct.
4. Were there stresses in your ministry during this time?
5. How would you describe your spiritual health around the time of the event?
6. How would you describe your relationship to your spouse (or other close relationships if not married) prior to the indiscretion?
7. As you were growing up were there any traumatic events that took place? If so what were these?
8. Growing up did you feel loved and accepted for who you are?
9. What do you think were the contribution factors as to why this occurred?
10. Is there any other information not discussed that would be helpful in discerning what could have helped prevent this from occurring?

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